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IN A WINTER CITY

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IN A WINTER CITY

By "OUIDA"

Introduction by
CARL VAN VECHTEN

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INTRODUCTION

MANY of my literary liaisons have been belated. Many books have been other men's mistresses before they have become mine. More than once I have blushed for my comfortable failure to keep up with the times, even the old times, although, occasionally, I remind myself with some pride that I read Daudet's Sapho before the prescribed age of twenty-one. This, however, was an exceptional performance. I can always look back and discover a new face. At the age of ninety, I expect to sit before my fire, dallying amorously with some overlooked masterpiece.

Sometimes (and with what delight!), I hit upon an entirely new name. That is a real experience in a wanton career of bibliophilic amours. More often, however, not only have I been long aware of the existence of the future beguiler of my intimate moments but also a volume or two by this author has snoozed patiently on my shelves, silently waiting the magic hour when its pages may begin to speak to me. I cannot say that I remember ever having been ignorant of Ouida but in some hazy way her work associated itself in my mind with that of the Duchess, Laura Jean Libbey, and Bertha M. Clay. Little by little, I became conscious that this name fell frequently from the lips of intelligent people. It was borne in upon me, insistently, if slowly, that I had missed something, just what was not too cer-

tain, but something important beyond any manner of doubt. Joseph Hergesheimer had read Ouida; Max Beerbohm had read Ouida, and not only devoted an essay to her, but also invented his most celebrated dedication in her honour; Edgar Fawcett had read Ouida; so had Stephen Crane, Vernon Lee, and G. S. Street. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Auberon Herbert read and admired her. G. K. Chesterton, reader for Fisher Unwin in 1899, wrote in his report of The Waters of Edera, "Though it is impossible not to smile at Ouida, it is equally impossible not to read her."

My curiosity, in time, was aroused. It behooved me, I began to believe, to follow in the footsteps of this illustrious, if somewhat incongruous, company. My mood was excellent for the enterprise. I was weary of modern novels, tainted with Freud and Fabre, weary of James Joyce and Dorothy Richardson and D. H. Lawrence, weary of Romain Rolland and his quest for a perfect world; what better time to sample the simpler delights of a novelist who had given as much pleasure to the recondite author of The Happy Hypocrite as she had to ingenuous chambermaids. I sought a guide to this bewildering forest (the bibliography lists forty-seven titles) and was referred to a long paper in the *Atlantic Monthly* for July, 1886, by Harriet Waters Preston, who seems to have been the first critic to inquire seriously into the causes of Ouida's popularity, but I found her admiration rather tepid. My second choice in ciceroni was more fortunate; it was Elizabeth Lee's Memoir, a fortuitous accident, for Ouida's life explains her work and gives it an intricacy of design that is not apparent to those who are ignorant of Mademoiselle

de la Ramée herself. Then I began to read the novels. . . .

Now those who have preceded me in this adventure, I discover, admire Ouida for qualities which undoubtedly she possesses, her passionate hatred of injustice, her love for animals, her feeling for beauty, and her painting of Italy. She assimilated and reproduced in a remarkable manner the spirit of this country. Even Henry James has given his grudging admiration to her handling of the Italian scene. Her sympathy for the peasant is responsible for many a nice piece of prose. In her review of the work of F. Marion Crawford, for example, she contradicts his assertion that the Italians are lacking in imagination: "This is but partially true; I am not sure that it is true at all. Their modern poetry is beautiful, more beautiful than that of any other nation. Their popular songs are poetic and impassioned as those of no other nation are, and one may hear among their peasantry expressions of singular beauty of sentiment and phrase. A woman of middle age, a contadina, said to me once, 'So long as one's mother lives, one's youth is never quite gone, for there is always somebody for whom one is young.' A rough, rude man, a day-labourer, who knew not a letter and spent all his life bent over his spade or plough, said to me once, one lovely night in spring, as he looked up at the full moon, 'How beautiful she is! But she has no heart. She sees us toiling and groaning and suffering down here, and she is always fair and calm, and never weeps!' Another said once, when a tree was hard to fell, 'He is sorry to come away, it has been his field so long.' And when a flock of solan geese flew over our land, going from the marshes

to the mountains on their homeward way, and descended to rest, the peasants did not touch them: 'They are tired, poor souls,' said one of the women; 'one must not grudge them the soil for their lodging.'" Her humanitarianism included a horror of war, oppressive taxation of the poor, vivisection, Joseph Chamberlain, and the German Emperor. She was a warm admirer of Georges Darien, the French anti-militarist novelist, the Barbusse, the John Dos Passos of the Franco-Prussian war. She deplored the desecration of the Tuscan countryside and the vandalism prevailing in Italian cities. While I am by no means blind to these æsthetic and moral virtues in her well-rounded work, I lay my wreath on another altar. My joy in Ouida is more akin to that of the chambermaid: I take an unfeigned delight in her description of the pleasant lives of the idle rich.

Readers of the Memoir, which might be called, "A Novel Without a Hero," will learn that Ouida was a snob. She was also vain, capricious, obstinate, and foolishly proud. She believed that her place in history would be with Semiramis, Aspasia, Cleopatra, and Madame de Staël. Pilgrims to the Villa Farinola or hostesses who had the daring to attempt her entertainment were certain to be snubbed, unless they knelt abjectly before her. Duchesses and Queens, alone, perhaps, were spared this dishonour and, in her critical papers and her letters, she even permitted herself to scoff at royalty (vide the scandalous verses addressed to Victoria, her arraignment of the Italian Royal Family, and her remarks, in her letters to the Baron Tauchnitz, concerning the Kaiser). In her novels this snobbishness assumed a still more curious form. The social climber in real life, the spend-

thrift, who sent to Worth in Paris for white, or pale-blue, or mouse-coloured satin and velvet gowns, with skirts short enough to expose her trim ankles, to wear driving on the dusty Tuscan roads, in her little victoria, drawn by the chestnut ponies, Mascherino and Birichini, with bunches of pheasant feathers stuck in their harness, once she took pen in hand, was uncompromising in her attitude towards luxury. She described the homes of the rich to the last marble staircase and the Aubusson-carpeted pavilion where wicked merriment took place; she counted every pearl on her adventuress's throat and, having added them, poured them over her pages, prodigally, by the bucketful. Rare flowers, priceless jewels, orphic baubles, elaborate toilets, and exotic foods are carted past the eye until the vision is surfeited, but it is only for the purpose, Ouida almost convinces herself, of showing the reader how empty is the life of the very rich. She has not convinced one reader. Ouida wrote of a life she would have liked to grace, she catalogued jewels she wanted to wear, she described men she desired to embrace. Nor was this merely the unintelligent envy of an outsider. She was enough on the inside to observe the objects of her envious attention at close range and she has set down their existence with an idealization of its power and fascination which, even when she most moralizes over its fatal rottenness, has almost decided me that the life of the idle English is the life for me.

Unrequited affection was another subject which obsessed her. Readers of the Memoir will again understand. At the age of fourteen, Ouida began to fall in love with any man who treated her with ordinary polite-

ness and believed him to be equally in love with her. Later, in her womanhood, an Italian Marchese became the embarrassed object of her attentions, and there is circumstantial evidence that she even felt amorously inclined towards Mario, for she always kept a picture of the tenor on her desk in her villa at Scandicci, and she idealized him as Corrèze in her novel, "Moths." Never, however, was her affection for a man reciprocated. In "Ariadnê," she depicts the real artist as always unhappy, always suffering, unless he can give himself wholly to his art and eschew human love.

It has long been a contention of mine that middle-class life is as dull in art as it is in reality. Ouida, seemingly, agreed with me. Her novels deal with the aristocracy or the peasantry or the artist class, never with the middle classes, except in the guise of nouveaux riches, whom she was never weary of ridiculing (classic examples are the Masserenes and Fuchsia Leach in "Moths"). In her report of the world that interested her, her imagination and her vitality were unflagging. There is something Homeric in her sweep and carrying power, something even Balzacian or at least Sandian in the superb manner in which she crowded a stupendous canvas with figures. Max Beerbohm, indeed, asserted that Mr. Meredith was "the only living novelist in England who rivals Ouida in sheer vitality." I like to think of her, attired in a Worth velvet gown, her hair loose and flying down her back (so she wore it on all occasions long past middle age), superbly ugly in her eccentric splendour, surrounded by her dogs, which Henry G. Huntington informs us had none too clean habits, dashing off in her broad hand, which wrote,

perhaps, sixty words to the page, her delightfully ecstatic romances. The unnumbered sheets were permitted to flutter to the floor. Later they were pieced together. Correction was unnecessary; verification of references unheard of. Has any other creator ever worked like this, directly from the imagination, save such geniuses as Gautier and Balzac and George Sand? "Her prodigality," Ambrose Bierce once wrote (and whatever one may say of the author of "The Devil's Dictionary," one cannot deny that he was a judge of intellect), "was seen chiefly in her expenditure of intellectual force, of which she wasted enough to have made a half-hundred better novelists than herself. Almost any contemporary worker at her trade would have profited as a dog under her intellectual table."

Never, except in some of her shorter stories, did Ouida rid herself entirely of her vice of redundancy. Her method of writing was largely to blame for this. But how delightful to read an author that one can skip occasionally! How tired one becomes, in perusing the closely-packed pages of "The Wings of the Dove," of holding one's eyes not only on the lines but on the spaces between the lines as well!

Mademoiselle de la Ramée struck her pace in her first novel, "Granville de Vigne; or, Held in Bondage." Other of her romances, possibly, are written with more care and with more art, but, with Max Beerbohm, I agree that Ouida was always Ouida. True lovers of this novelist will not concur with the hesitant and belated opinions of those who suddenly and condescendingly discover the importance of the change in her style and manner with the publication of "The Masserenes," which

Ouida herself admitted was "worth 10,000 'Trilbys.'" The change in style and manner are certainly to be noted, but the ecstatic natural glamour which made her what she was that day, just as certainly were apparent in "Granville de Vigne." For some, perhaps, there may be too much glamour, but as Mr. Street has sensibly remarked, "You must allow the convention—the convention between you and the temperament of your author."

In "Granville de Vigne," Ouida introduces us to the first of her daring, intrepid, ultra-raffiné, wasp-waisted guardsmen, the fascinating Vivian Sabretasche: "They said he was deucedly dangerous to women, and one could hardly wonder if he was. A gallant soldier in the field, a charming companion in a club or mess-room, accomplished in music, painting, sculpture, as in the hardier arts of rifle and rod, speaking eight continental languages with equal facility, his manners exquisitely tender and gentle, his voice soft as the Italian he best loved to speak, his face and form of unusual beauty, and to back him, all that subtler art that is only acquired in the Eleusinia of the boudoir—no marvel if women, his pet playthings, did go down before Vivian Sabretasche." It is from this book, too, that I have culled what is perhaps, all things considered, my favourite passage in all fiction, that descriptive of Constance Trefusis, the first of Ouida's wicked, wicked, women: "Magnificent she looked in some geranium-hued dress, as light and brilliant as summer clouds, with the rose tint of sunset on them, and large white water-lilies in her massive raven hair, turned back à l'impératrice off her low brow, under which her eyes shot such Parthian glances. One could hardly wonder that De Vigne offended past redemption

the Duchess of Margoldswurzel, ruined himself for life with his aunt, the Marchioness of Marqueterie, annoyed beyond hope of pardon the Countess of Ormolu, the five baronesses, all the ladies in their own right, all the great heiresses, all the county princesses-royal, all the archery-party beauties, and, careless of rank, right, or comment, opened the ball with—the Trefusis."

If, among this prodigal writer's books, there is one for which I hold a particular affection, it is, I think, "Idalia," that romance of a rich and powerful superwoman, patriot and revolutionist, the fascinating and devastating Countess Vassilis, who, in her implications, occasionally reminds one of both Sandra Belloni and the Princess Casamassima. This opus vividly suggests an opera to me, with Mary Garden as Idalia, "the lady of his dreams," as Ouida would have called the book but for the intervention of Harrison Ainsworth, editor of the *New Monthly Magazine,* in which the story first appeared; it is easy to imagine Mary Garden in her torn domino, having been forcibly dragged from the masked ball, confined in the monastery, confronting with chaste contempt the vicious Monsignore Villaflor. As a matter of fact, the book was dramatized almost immediately after its publication and the play seems to have met with success in London. But what living actor or tenor would be the embodiment of the brave and beautiful Sir Fulke Erceldoune?

In one of his letters, Flaubert asserts, "Very great men often write very badly, and so much the better for them." Many sermons might be preached from this text. A convenient but sometimes arbitrary manner of dividing creators of fiction is to classify them as geniuses and

artists. Dostoyevsky, for example, was a genius, and Turgeniev, an artist. Among ponderous coeval critics it is fashionable to deride the work of Gertrude Atherton and to praise the labour of Edith Wharton. I believe this to be an error of judgment. Mrs. Wharton is indubitably more of an artist than Mrs. Atherton. Mrs. Atherton on the other hand is a genius, not a genius of the first order, to be sure, but a writer of inspiration and imagination with a true flair for story-telling. Mrs. Wharton, to some extent, conceals her deficiencies in this direction by her art in telling her stories. I might make my meaning plainer if I state that it is obvious to me that Mrs. Atherton is a direct descendant of George Sand and Ouida, while Mrs. Wharton may claim some relationship, if she cares to, with George Eliot and Mrs. Humphry Ward. The comparison may be carried into the realm of painting: Whistler, for example, was an artist, while Cézanne was a genius. It was Cézanne's avowed ambition to paint like Ingres, an ambition he never quite realized. To carry this discussion into the field of music is more difficult, for, in this art, form and idea are identical, but, even here, there are exceptions; for Moussorgsky was certainly more of a genius than an artist; so, conceivably, were Stephen Foster and Ethelbert Nevin. It is possible, of course, to be both, but the combination is rare and in most cases arguable. What, for instance, would George Moore be without his art? What, Theodore Dreiser, without his genius? In the case of Ouida, there is no argument. Ouida was not an artist, but just as surely she was a genius.

Remy de Gourmont once remarked, "Le style, c'est de sentir, de voir, de penser, et rien plus." If this be true,

Ouida assuredly has style. She feels her characters; she has observed their milieu. Indeed, it is one of her most characteristic faults that she has too much feeling. Friendship, that *roman à clef,* which relates her side (was there another?) of her eccentric love affair with the Marchese Lotteringhi Della Stufa, whom Ouida met in 1871 and for whom she conceived the one grand passion of her life, would have benefited by the exercise of a colder pen. The background, however, here, as elsewhere, is carefully studied. Street caught the truth when he remarked that the essentials are there. And Max Beerbohm has pointed out that Ouida's lavish descriptions of interiors are not clichés, in the manner, say, of Mrs. Alexander McVeigh Miller;[1] they are actuated by her real love of beauty and are meticulously observed and described. Baudelaire exclaimed of Théophile Gautier, "Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" This apostrophe might just as reasonably have been addressed to Ouida.

"In writing 'Patience,' Gilbert thought he was copying Oscar Wilde, whereas he was drawing Willie Yeats out of the womb of Time," Mr. George Moore once remarked. When Dickens created Harold Skimpole in "Bleak House," the world and Leigh Hunt himself thought that Leigh Hunt had been intended, but Dickens was really drawing Oscar Wilde out of the womb of Time. "The best appreciation of Bernard Shaw is that written some twenty years before he was born: I refer to Carlyle's 'Sartor Resartus,'" declares Herbert Skimpole. "Shaw is

[1] Authoress of "The Bride of the Tomb; or, Lancelot Darling's Betrothed."

an embodiment of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, the Philosopher of Clothes." Shaw himself has said, "I have noticed that when a certain type appears in painting and is greatly admired, it presently becomes common in Nature." Charles Dudley Warner was aware of this phenomenon. He blamed the feeble, underbred literature of America for the herds of feeble, underbred Americans. Even "Nature herself seems readily to fall into imitation. It was noticed by the friends of nature that when the peculiar coal-tar colours were discovered, the same faded, æsthetic and sometimes sickly colours began to appear in the ornamental flower-beds and masses of foliage plants." And Warner reminds us of the effect of "Werther," of "Childe Harold," and of "Don Juan" on an impressionable populace, the result of the painting of Rossetti, which popularized red hair and clinging robes of "dirty-greens." In "Moby Dick," Herman Melville writes, "The Brahmins maintain that in the almost endless sculptures of this immemorial pagoda (the famous cavern-pagoda of Elephanta in India) all the trades and pursuits, every conceivable avocation of man, were prefigured before any of them actually came into being." In the thirty-second chapter of "The Adventures of Philip," Thackeray speaks of Beethoven's "Dream of St. Jerome," which is not mentioned in any catalogue of Beethoven's works. There were, however, so many requests for this opus after Thackeray's reference to it, that in due time it appeared and now it may be purchased at any respectable music-dealer's. Eliphas Levi says that the wise man cannot lie because nature will accommodate herself to his statement. Oscar Wilde embroidered the theme: "Life imitates art far

more than art imitates life. A great artist invents a type, and life tries to copy it, to reproduce it in a popular form, like an enterprising publisher. Schopenhauer has analyzed the pessimism that characterizes modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product. He was invented by Turgeniev, and completed by Dostoyevsky. Robespierre came out of the pages of Rousseau as surely as the People's Palace rose out of the débris of a novel. Literature always anticipates life." In her report of the world, then, Ouida may have been a trifle inaccurate, but she found no difficulty in creating a world of her own, a world which, to some extent at least, has existed since she created it. Ouida's society is a little wickeder, a little gayer, a little richer than the real thing, but Heaven knows that society since her day has tried to live up to her specifications. Lanky guardsmen with their wasp-waists, the vampire of the silver screen, these we owe to Ouida's imagination.

There is another phase of Ouida's talent that deserves a passing reference, her essays in criticism. Ouida was an excellent critic, clear-sighted, independent, fearless. She formed independent judgments and said what she thought. At the age of eleven, we find her recording in her diary that she preferred Florian to La Fontaine, "although this gentleman is such a favourite with the public." Sydney C. Cockerell visited Tolstoy in 1903 and was full of enthusiasm for the Russian as a thinker and a writer. Ouida was not impressed. "To me," she wrote to Cockerell, "Tolstoy has not much intellect.

Many of his doctrines are absolutely foolish. He has little judgment of literature, and not much, surely, of men. His admiration of Dickens proves the non-intellectual fibre of his mind; and his mortality and monogamy are against common sense and nature." Again: "Thanks for the Tolstoys. But I know all his views and arguments. When he says that 'any rational being requires to believe in a god,' he shows how limited his mind is. Probably if he had not been a Russian he would have been a much greater man. In many ways he is absolutely silly. In vulgar parlance, his doctrines 'will not wash.' Observe, too, how he ignores the fact that fighting is *natural* to man. See a little child's rage before it can speak; its angry gestures, its inflamed face, its dumb fury. Men would not live in peace together if armies were abolished. Tolstoy does not realize that man is a very rudimentary, imperfect creature, occupying a very small space in an immense and unknown universe." Of patriotism, she remarked: "Patriotism is not what we want in Europe and America. It is a much wider, finer, more impersonal feeling." Of the Oscar Wilde trial, she wrote to her friend, Mrs. Huntington: "It may be very immoral of me, but I do not think the law should meddle with these offences. The publicity aroused does much more harm than the offence itself." She described Wilde as a successful poseur and a plagiarist. Perhaps she thought he owed something to her. I shall always believe that the author of "Lady Windermere's Fan" caught the trick of smart comedy dialogue from the talk of Lady Cardiff (a portrait of Ouida's friend, Lady Orford), in "Friendship." Wilde, it is on record,

called on Ouida at the Hotel Langham in London in 1887.

Ouida's study of D'Annunzio, the first to appear in England, is rather remarkable and stands up well today, even when it is compared with Henry James's criticism of the Italian writer. No less a judge than Ernest Boyd, indeed, has called it the best paper on the author of "The Triumph of Death" that has yet appeared. It is a pity that she did not turn her attention more frequently to this branch of writing. "Critical Studies," although it contains her diatribe against Joseph Chamberlain, and papers on subjects dear to her heart such as the ugliness of modern life, humanitarianism, and the decadence of the Latin races, is made up for the most part of essays on the novel, or essays on novelists, in which she often expresses her views on the writing of fiction. It is entirely characteristic of this lady that she frequently saw in others the faults she never saw in herself. In her essay on D'Annunzio, she writes, "The tendency of redundancy is not his fault alone; it is that of his time." In this paper she continues to be unconsciously brutal to herself: "There is unhappily an absolute absence of wit, of mirth, of humour." Ouida herself was gifted with a certain type of wit but she was entirely lacking in humour. "He does not trust enough to the power of suggestion," she goes on, and she takes Bourget to task for using foreign words! In "Ariadnê," there is a eulogy of Shakespeare which does the author much credit; she finds in his work "never a drop of envy or spleen." This from the author of "Friendship"! In "Frescoes" may be found her celebrated paper on Romance and Realism, which contains her

cri de cœur: she asks her readers to remember that the passion flower is as real as the potato. She seems to have held the idea that realism was a matter of subject and not of method. A comparison of Laura Pearl in "Puck" with Zola's Nana will prove that even passion flowers can be dealt with in two distinct manners.

As I have remarked earlier in this paper, everybody reads Ouida, but only men like Joseph Hergesheimer and Max Beerbohm are not ashamed to admit it. G. S. Street observes, "Her faults, which are obvious, have brought it about that she is placed, in the general estimation of critics, below writers without a tenth of her ability." "The world takes its revenge on us for having despised it," she wailed to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. I think that some of the inhibitions of the world and its critics in regard to Ouida are due to the printings and bindings of her novels. In America, their most elaborate dress is the red or green volumes stamped with gold, issued by Lippincott in Philadelphia. The reprints of Chatto and Windus in London are even worse, bound in tomato red, and printed from carious plates in small letters. Indubitably, a new edition of Ouida, on good paper, handsomely printed and bound, with prefaces by some of her more illustrious admirers, would do much to dispel the current illusion that in reading Ouida one is descending to the depths of English literature. I suspect, indeed, that if Ouida were suitably printed and bound she would begin to rank not very much below Dickens and Thackeray and considerably above the turgid George Eliot. I must confess, however, that personally I have a fancy for the old bindings. There is a delight for me in reading Ouida in the form in which

she is most easily procurable. A certain old-fashioned artlessness clings to the battered volumes, in the form in which at present they occupy more than five feet of the shelves on my garret walls. And when her works are re-issued in stately large-paper reprints with introductions by Edmund Gosse and J. Middleton Murry, I shall still remain faithful to the set I have collected with so much pains.

December 29, 1921

It was not, after all, Edmund Gosse or J. Middleton Murry who wrote the first preface to a book by Ouida. That honour has fallen on my own delighted shoulders. Horace Liveright, with the unconventional acumen of which he possesses so large a share, has decided to include a novel by Mademoiselle Louise de la Ramée in his Modern Library, an enterprise on which he embarks with my heartiest approbation. For this purpose "In a Winter City" has been chosen.

This novel was first published by Chapman and Hall in London in 1876. In the list of the author's works it immediately succeeded Signa and preceded "Ariadnê," "Friendship," and "Moths." The winter city, Floralia, is, of course, Florence, and the reader is offered a vivid picture of English social life there in the seventies. According to Elizabeth Lee some of the traits of the cold and beautiful heroine, Lady Hilda Vorarlberg, were suggested by Lady Paget, to whom Ouida dedicated "Wanda." Hilda's cousin, the gay, semi-vicious femme galante, Mila, Countess de Caviare, and her cavalière servente, Maurice, Vicomte de Gommeux, are striking

figures. Not only Oscar Wilde's comedies, but also Benson's "Dodo" and the early Robert Hichens probably all owe something to the conversation Ouida ascribes to these rich Londoners abroad. I should like to offer the scene between Lady Hilda and her brother in Chapter X as an example of what this novelist could do when she tried.

March 26, 1923
New York

CARL VAN VECHTEN.

IN A WINTER CITY

IN A WINTER CITY

A SKETCH

CHAPTER I

FLORALIA was once a city of great fame. It stands upon an historical river. It is adorned with all that the Arts can assemble of beauty, of grace, and of majesty. Its chronicles blaze with heroical deeds and with the achievements of genius. Great men have been bred within its walls; men so great that the world has never seen their like again.

Floralia, in her liberties, in her citizens, in her poets and painters and sculptors, once upon a time had few rivals, perhaps, indeed, no equals, upon earth.

By what strange irony of fate, by what singular cynical caprice of accident, has this fairest of cities, with her time-honoured towers lifted to her radiant skies, become the universal hostelry of cosmopolitan fashion and of fashionable idleness? Sad vicissitudes of fallen fortunes! —to such base uses do the greatest come.

It is Belisarius turned croupier to a gaming-table; it is Caesar selling cigars and newspapers; it is Apelles drawing for the "Albums pour Rire"; it is Pindar rhyming the couplets for "Fleur de Thé"; it is Praxiteles designing costumes for a Calico-ball; it is Phidias forming the poses of a ballet!

Perhaps the mighty ghosts of mediaeval Floralia do walk, sadly and ashamed, by midnight under the shadow of its exquisite piles of marble and of stone. If they do, nobody sees them: the cigarette smoke is too thick.

As for the modern rulers of Floralia, they have risen elastic and elated to the height of the situation, and have done their best and uttermost to degrade their city into due accordance with her present circumstances, and have destroyed as much as they dared of her noble picturesqueness and ancient ways. They have tacked on to her venerable palaces and graceful towers, stucco mansions and straight hideous streets, and staring walls covered with advertisements, and barren boulevards studded with toy trees that are cropped as soon as they presume to grow a leaf, and have striven all they know to fit her for her fortunes, as her inn-keepers, when they take an antique palace, hasten to fit up a smoking-room, and, making a paradise of gas jets and liqueurs, write over it "Il Bar Americano."

It is considered very clever to adapt oneself to one's fortunes; and if so, the rulers of Floralia are very clever indeed; only the stucco and the straight streets and the frightful boulevards cost money, and Floralia has no money and a very heavy and terrible debt; and whether it be really worth while to deface a most beautiful and artistic city, and ruin your nobles and gentry, and grind down your artizans and peasants, and make your whole province impoverished and ill-content for the mere sake of pleasing some strangers by the stucco and the hoardings that their eyes are used to at home;—well, that perhaps may be an open question.

The Lady Hilda Vorarlberg had written thus far when

she got tired, left off, and looked out of the window on to the mountain-born and poet-hymned river of Floralia. She had an idea that she would write a novel; she was always going to do things that she never did do.

After all they were not her own ideas that she had written; but only those of a Floralian, the Duca della Rocca, whom she had met the night before. But then the ideas of everybody have been somebody else's beforehand,—Plato's, or Bion's, or Theophrastus's; or your favourite newspaper's;—and the Lady Hilda, although she had been but two days in the Winter City, had already in her first drive shuddered at the stucco and the hoardings, and shivered at the boulevards and the little shaven trees. For she was a person of very refined and fastidious taste, and did really know something about the arts, and such persons suffer very acutely from what the peculiar mind of your modern municipalities calls, in its innocence, "improvements."

The Lady Hilda had been to a reception too the night before, and had gone with the preconceived conviction that a certain illustrious Sovereign had not been far wrong when she had called Floralia the Botany Bay of modern society; but then the Lady Hilda was easily bored, and not easily pleased, and liked very few things, almost none;—she liked her horses, she liked M. Worth, she liked bric-à-brac, she liked her brother, Lord Clairvaux, and when she came to think of it,—well, that was really all.

The Lady Hilda was a beautiful woman, and knew it; she was dressed in the height of fashion, *i. e.,* like a mediaeval saint out of a picture; her velvet robe clung close to her, and her gold belt, with its chains and pouch

and fittings, would not have disgraced Cellini's own working; her hair was in a cloud in front and in a club behind; her figure was perfect: M. Worth, who is accustomed to furnish figures as well as clothes, had a great reverence for her; in her, Nature, of whom generally speaking he is disposed to think very poorly, did not need his assistance; he thought it extraordinary, but as he could not improve her in that respect, he had to be content with draping Perfection, which he did to perfection of course.

Her face also was left to nature, in a very blamable degree for a woman of fashion. Her friends argued to her that any woman, however fair a skin she might have, must look washed out without enamel or rouge at the least. But the Lady Hilda, conscious of her own delicate bloom, was obdurate on the point.

"I would rather look washed out than caked over," she would reply: which was cruel but conclusive. So she went into the world without painting, and made them all look beside her as if they had come out of a comic opera.

In everything else she was, however, as artificial as became her sex, her station, and her century.

She was a very fortunate woman; at least society always said so. The Clairvaux people were very terribly poor, though very noble and mighty. She had been married at sixteen, immediately on her presentation, to a great European capitalist of nondescript nationality, who had made an enormous fortune upon the Stock Exchanges in ways that were never enquired into, and this gentleman, whose wealth was as solid as it sounded fabulous, had had the good taste to die in the first months

of their wedded life, leaving her fifty thousand a year, and bequeathing the rest of his money to the Prince Imperial. Besides her large income she had the biggest jewels, the choicest horses, the handsomest house in London, the prettiest hôtel in Paris, etc., etc., etc.; and she could very well afford to have a fresh toilette a day from her friend Worth if she chose. Very often she did choose. "What a lucky creature," said every other woman: and so she was. But she would have been still more so had she not been quite so much bored. Boredom is the ill-natured pebble that always *will* get in the golden slipper of the pilgrim of pleasure.

The Lady Hilda looked out of the window and found it raining heavily. When the sky of Floralia does rain, it does it thoroughly, and gets the disagreeable duty over, which is much more merciful to mankind than the perpetual drizzle and dripping of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, or Middlesex. It was the rain that had made her almost inclined to think she would write a novel; she was so tired of reading them.

She countermanded her carriage; had some more wood thrown on the fire; and felt disposed to regret that she had decided to winter here. She missed all her *bibelots,* and all the wonderful shades and graces of colour with which her own houses were made as rich, yet as subdued in tone as any old cloisonné enamel. She had the finest rooms, here, in an hôtel which had been the old palace of Murat; and she had sent for flowers to fill every nook and corner of them, an order which Floralia will execute for as many francs as any other city would ask in napoleons.

But there is always a nakedness and a gaudiness in the

finest suites of any hôtel; and the Lady Hilda, though she had educated little else, had so educated her eyes and her taste that a *criant* bit of furniture hurt her as the grating of a false quantity hurts a scholar. She knew the value of greys and creams and lavenders and olive greens and pale sea blues and dead gold and oriental blendings. She had to seat herself now in an armchair that was of a brightness and newness in magenta brocade that made her close her eyelids involuntarily to avoid the horror of it, as she took up some letters from female friends and wondered why they wrote them, and took up a tale of Zola's and threw it aside in disgust, and began to think that she would go to Algeria, since her doctors had agreed that her lungs would not bear the cold of Paris this winter.

Only there was no art in Algeria and there was plenty in Floralia, present and traditional, and so far as a woman of fashion can demean herself to think seriously of anything beyond dress and rivalry, she had in a way studied art of all kinds, languidly indeed and perhaps superficially, but still with some true understanding of it; for, although she had done her best, as became a *femme comme il faut,* to stifle the intelligence she had been created with, she yet had moments in which M. Worth did not seem Jehovah, and in which Society scarcely appeared the Alpha and Omega of human existence, as of course they did to her when she was in her right frame of mind.

"I shall go to Algeria or Rome," she said to herself: it rained pitilessly, hiding even the bridges on the opposite side of the river; she had a dreadful magenta-coloured chair, and the window curtains were scarlet; the letters

were on thin foreign paper and crossed; the book was unreadable; at luncheon they had given her horrible soup and a vol-au-vent that for all flavour it possessed might have been made of acorns, ship-biscuit and shalots; and she had just heard that her cousin the Countess de Caviare, whom she never approved of, and who always borrowed money of her, was coming also to the Hôtel Murat. It was not wonderful that she settled in her own mind to leave Floralia as soon as she had come to it.

It was four o'clock.

She thought she would send round to the bric-à-brac dealers, and tell them to bring her what china and enamels and things they had in their shops for her to look at; little that is worth having ever comes into the market in these days, save when private collections are publicly sold; she knew the Hôtel Drouot and Christie and Manson's too well not to know that; still it would be something to do.

Her hand was on the bell when one of her servants entered. He had a card on a salver.

"Does Madame receive?" he asked, in some trepidation, for do what her servants might they generally did wrong; when they obeyed her she had almost invariably changed her mind before her command could be executed, and when they did not obey her, then the Clairvaux blood, which was crossed with French and Russian, and had been Norman to begin with, made itself felt in her usually tranquil veins.

She glanced at the card. It might be a bric-à-brac dealer's.

On it was written "Duca della Rocca." She paused doubtfully some moments.

"It is raining very hard," she thought; then gave a sign of assent.

Everybody wearied her after ten minutes; still when it was raining so hard—

CHAPTER II

"THEY say," the great assassin who slays as many thousands as ever did plague or cholera, drink or warfare; "they say," the thief of reputation, who steals, with stealthy step and coward's mask, to filch good names away in the dead dark of irresponsible calumny; "they say," a giant murderer, iron-gloved to slay you, a fleet, elusive, vaporous will-o'-the-wisp, when you would seize and choke it; "they say," mighty Thug though it be which strangles from behind the purest victim, had not been ever known to touch the Lady Hilda.

She seemed very passionless and cold; and no one ever whispered that she was not what she seemed. Possibly she had enjoyed so unusual an immunity, first, because she was so very rich; secondly, because she had many male relations; thirdly, because women, whilst they envied, were afraid of her. Anyway, her name was altogether without reproach; the only defect to be found in her in the estimate of many of her adorers.

Married without any wish of her own being consulted, and left so soon afterwards mistress of herself and of very large wealth, she had remained altogether indifferent and insensible to all forms of love. Other women fell in love in all sorts of ways, feebly or forcibly, according to their natures, but she never.

The passions she excited broke against her serene contempt, like surf on a rocky shore. She was the despair of all the "tueurs de femmes" of Europe.

"Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien," she said to her brother once, when she had refused the hereditary Prince of Deutschland; "I can do exactly as I like; I have everything I want; I can follow all my own whims; I am perfectly happy; why ever should I alter all this? What could any man ever offer me that would be better?"

Lord Clairvaux was obliged to grumble that he did not know what any man could.

"Unless you were to care for the man," he muttered shamefacedly.

"Oh-h-h!" said the Lady Hilda, with the most prolonged delicate and eloquent interjection of amazed scorn.

Lord Clairvaux felt that he had been as silly and rustic as if he were a ploughboy. He was an affectionate creature himself, in character very like a Newfoundland dog, and had none of his sister's talent and temperament; he loved her dearly, but he was always a little afraid of her.

"Hilda don't say much to you, but she just gives you a look; and don't you sink into your shoes!" he said once to a friend.

He stood six feet three without the shoes, to whose level her single glance could so pathetically reduce him.

But except before herself, Lord Clairvaux, in his shoes or out of them, was the bravest and frankest gentleman that ever walked the earth; and the universal recollection of him and of his unhesitating habit of "setting things straight," probably kept so in awe the calumny-makers, that he produced the miracle of a woman who actually was blameless getting the credit of being so. Usually

snow is deemed black, and coal is called swan's-down, with that refreshing habit of contrariety which alone saves society from stagnation.

It never occurred to her what a tower of strength for her honour was that good-looking, good-tempered, stupid, big brother of hers, who could not spell a trisyllable were it ever so, and was only learned in racing stock and greyhound pedigrees; but she was fond of him in a cool and careless way, as she might have been of a big dog, and was prodigal in gifts to him of great winners and brood mares.

She never went to stay with him at Broomsden; she disliked his wife, her sister-in-law, and she was always bored to death in English country houses, where the men were out shooting all day, and half asleep all the evening. The country people, the salt of the earth in their own eyes, were infinitesimal as ants in hers. She detested drives in pony-carriages, humdrum chitchat, and afternoon tea in the library; she did not care in the least who had bagged how many brace; the details of fast runs with hounds were as horribly tiresome to her as the boys home from Eton; and she would rather have gone a pilgrimage to Lourdes than have descended to the ball, where all sorts of nondescripts had to be asked, and the dresses positively haunted her like ghosts.

Five years before, at Broomsden, she had taken up her candlestick after three nights of unutterable boredom between her sister-in-law and a fat duchess, and had mentally vowed never to return there. The vow she had kept, and she had always seen Clairvaux in Paris, in London, in Baden—anywhere rather than in the home of their childhood, towards which she had no tenderness

of sentiment, but merely recollections of the fierc tyrannies of many German governesses.

She would often buy him a colt out of the Lagrang or Lafitte stables; and always send half Boissier's an Siraudin's shops to his children at Christmas time

That done, she considered nothing more could be ex pected of her: it was certainly not necessary that sh should bore herself.

To spend money was an easy undemonstrative manne of acknowledging the ties of nature, which pleased an suited her. Perhaps she would have been capable o showing her affection in nobler and more self-sacrificin ways; but then there was nothing in her circumstances t call for that kind of thing; no trouble ever came nigh her and the chariot of her life rolled as smoothly as her ow victoria *à huit ressorts*.

For the ten years of her womanhood the Lady Hild had had the command of immense wealth. Anythin short of that seemed to her abject poverty. She coul theorize about making herself into Greuze or Gainsboro pictures in serge or dimity; but, in fact, she could n imagine herself without all the black sables and silve fox, the velvets and silks, the diamonds and emeralds, th embroideries and laces that made her a thing whic Titian would have worshipped.

She could not imagine herself for an instant withou power of limitless command, limitless caprice, ceasele indulgence, boundless patronage, and all the gratificatio of whim and will which go with the possession of a gre fortune and the enjoyment of an entire irresponsibilit

She was bored and annoyed very often indeed becaus Pleasure is not as inventive a god as he ought to be, an

his catalogue is very soon run through; but it never by any chance occurred to her that it might be her money which bored her.

When, on a very dreary day early in November, Lady Hilda, known by repute all over Europe as the proudest, handsomest, coldest woman in the world, and famous as an *élégante* in every fashionable city, arrived at the Hôtel Murat, in the town of Floralia, and it was known that she had come to establish herself there for the winter (unless, indeed, she changed her mind, which was probable), the stir in the city was extraordinary. She brought with her several servants, several carriage horses, immense jewel cases, and a pug dog. She was the great arrival of the season.

There was a Grand Duchess of Dresden, indeed, who came at the same time, but she brought no horses; she hired her *coupé* from a livery-stable, and her star, notwithstanding its royalty, paled in proportion. Besides, the Grand Duchess was a very little, shabby, insignificant person, who wore black stuff dresses, and a wig without any art in it. She was music-mad, and Wagner was her prophet. The Club took no account of her.

There is a club in Floralia, nay, it is the Club;—all other clubs being for purposes gymnastic, patriotic, theatric, or political, and out of society altogether.

The Club is very fond of black-balling, and gives very odd reasons for doing so, instead of the simple and true one, that it wants to keep itself to itself. It has been known to object to one man because his hair curled, and to another because he was the son of a king, and to another because his boots were not made in Paris. Be its reasons, however, good, bad, or indifferent, it pleases

itself; by its fiat newly arrived women are exalted to th empyrean, or perish in obscurity, and its members ar the cream of masculine Floralia, and spend all fine after noons on the steps and the pavement, blocking up th passageway in the chief street, and criticizing all equi pages and their occupants.

When the Lady Hilda's victoria, with the two blacks and the white and black liveries, swept past the Club there was a great stir in these philosophers of the stones Most knew her by sight very well; two or three knew her personally, and these fortunate few, who had th privilege to raise their hats as that carriage went by rose immediately in the esteem of their fellows.

"Je n'ai jamais rien connu de si épatant," said th French Duc de St. Louis, who belongs to a past genera tion, but is much more charming and witty than any thing to be found in the present one.

"Twelve hundred and fifty thousand francs a-year," murmured the Marchese Sampierdareno, with a sigh He was married himself.

"Here is your 'affaire,' Paolo," said Don Carlo Ma remma to a man next him.

The Duca della Rocca, to whom he spoke, stroke his moustache, and smiled a little.

"She is a very beautiful person," he answered; " have seen her before at the Tuileries and at Trouville but I do not know her at all. I was never presented."

"That will arrange itself easily," said the Duc de St Louis, who was one of those who had raised their hats "Maremma is perfectly right; it is in every way the ver thing for you. Moi, je m'en charge."

The Duca della Rocca shrugged his shoulders a ver

little, and lighted a fresh cigar. But his face grew grave, and he looked thoughtfully after the black horses, and the white and black liveries.

At the English reception that night, which the Lady Hilda disdainfully likened in her own mind to a penal settlement, M. de St. Louis, whom she knew very well, begged to be permitted to present to her his friend the Duca della Rocca.

She was dressed like a mediaeval saint of a morning; at night she was a mediaeval princess.

She had feuille morte velvet slashed with the palest of ambers; a high fraise; sleeves of the renaissance; pointed shoes, and a great many jewels. Della Rocca thought she might have stepped down out of a Giorgione canvas, and ventured to tell her so. He gave her the carte du pays of the penal settlement around her, and talked to her more seriously for some considerable time. Himself and the Duc de St. Louis were the only people she deigned to take any notice of; and she went away in an hour, or rather less, leaving a kind of flame from her many jewels behind her, and a frozen sense of despair in the hearts of the women, who had watched her, appalled yet fascinated.

"Mais quelle femme impossible!" said Della Rocca, as he went out into the night air.

"Impossible! mais comment donc?" said the Duc de St. Louis, with vivacity and some anger.

The Duc de St. Louis worshipped her, as every year of his life he worshipped three hundred and sixty-five ladies.

"Impossible!" echoed Della Rocca, with a cigar in his mouth.

Nevertheless, the next day, when the rain was falling in such torrents that no female creature was likely to be anywhere but before her fire, he called at the Hôtel Murat, and inquired if Miladi were visible, and being admitted, as better than nothing, as she would have admitted the bric-à-brac man, followed the servant upstairs, and walked into an atmosphere scented with some three hundred pots of tea roses, lilies of the valley, and hothouse heliotrope.

"Ah, ah! you have been to see her. Quite right," said the Duc de St. Louis, meeting him as he came down the steps of the hotel in the rain, when it was half-past five by the clock. "I am going also so soon as I have seen Salvareo at the Club about the theatricals; it will not take me a moment; get into my cab, you are going there too? How is Miladi? You found her charming?"

"She was in a very bad humour," replied Della Rocca, closing the cab door on himself.

"The more interesting for you to put her in a good one."

"Would either good or bad last ten minutes?—you know her: I do not, but I should doubt it."

The Duc arranged the fur collar of his coat.

"She is a woman, and rich; too rich, if one can say so. Of course she has her caprices——"

Della Rocca shrugged his shoulders.

"She is very handsome. But she does not interest me."

The Duc smiled, and glanced at him.

"Then you probably interested her. It is much better you should not be interested. Men who are interested may blunder."

"She is vain—she is selfish—she is arrogant," said Della Rocca, with great decision.

"Oho!—all that you find out already? You did not amuse her long?——"

"C'est une femme exagérée en tout," pursued Della Rocca, disregarding.

"No! Exaggeration is vulgar—is bad taste. Her taste is excellent—unexceptionable——"

"Exagérée en tout!" repeated Della Rocca, with much emphasis. "Dress—jewels—habits—temper—everything. She had three hundred pots of flowers in her room!"

"Flower-pots, pooh!—that is English. It is very odd," pursued the Duc pensively, "but they really do like the smell of flowers."

"Only because they cost so much to rear in their fogs. If they were common as with us, they would throw them out of the window as we do."

"Nevertheless, send her three hundred pots more. Il faut commencer la cour, mon cher."

Della Rocca looked out into the rain.

"I have no inclination—I dislike a woman of the world."

The Duc chuckled a little.

"Ah, ah! since when, caro mio?"

"There is no simplicity—there is no innocence—there is no sincerity——"

"Bah!" said the Duc, with much disdain; "I do not know where you have got those new ideas, nor do I think they are your own at all. Have you fallen in love with a 'jeune Mees' with apple-red cheeks and sweetmeats in her pocket? Simplicity—innocence—sin-

cerity. Very pretty. Our old friend of a million vaudevilles, L'Ingénue. We all know her. What is she in real truth?—A swaddled bundle of Ignorance. Cut the swaddling band—ugh! and Ignorance flies to Knowledge as Eve did, only Ignorance does not want to know good and evil: the evil contents her: she stops short at that. Yes—yes, L'Ingénue will marry you that she may read Zola and Belot; that she may go to La Biche au Bois; that she may smoke cigars with young men; that she may have her dresses cut half-way down her spine; that she may romp like a half-drunk harlot in all the cotillons of the year! Whereas your woman of the world, if well chosen——"

"Will have done all these things beforehand at some one else's expense, and will have tired of them,—or not have tired——; of the display of spine and of the cotillon she will certainly never have tired unless she be fifty——"

"That is not precisely what I mean," said the Duc, caressing his small white moustache. "No; I said well chosen—well chosen. What it can matter to you whether your wife smokes with young men, or reads bad novels, or romps till breakfast, I do not see myself. There is a natural destiny for husbands. The unwise fret over it—the wise profit by it. But considering that you dislike these things in your own wife, however much you like and admire them in the wives of other persons, I would still say, avoid our friend of a million vaudevilles—la petite Mees de seize ans. Ignorance is not innocence, it is a great mistake to suppose that it even secures it. Your Mees would seize Belot and Zola à la reveille des noces—— Miladi yonder, for instance, when

they come to her from her book seller's, throws them aside, unread——"

"There was a book of Zola's on her table today——"

"I would bet ten thousand francs that she had not gone beyond the title-page," interrupted the Duc, with petulance. "TASTE, mon cher Della Rocca, is the only sure guarantee in these matters. Women, believe me never have any principle. Principle is a backbone, and no woman—except bodily—ever possesses any backbone. Their priests and their teachers and their mothers fill them with doctrines and conventionalities—all things of mere word and wind. No woman has any settled principles; if she have any vague ones, it is the uttermost she ever reaches, and those can always be overturned by any man who has any influence over her. But Taste is another matter altogether. A woman whose taste is excellent is preserved from all eccentricities and most follies. You never see a woman of good sense *afficher* her improprieties or advertise her liaisons as women of vulgarity do. Nay, if her taste be perfect, though she have weaknesses, I doubt if she will ever have vices. Vice will seem to her like a gaudy colour, or too much gold braid, or very large plaids, or buttons as big as saucers, or anything else such as vulgar women like. Fastidiousness, at any rate, is very good *postiche* for modesty: it is always decent, it can never be coarse. Good taste, inherent and ingrained, natural and cultivated, cannot alter. Principles—ouf!—they go on and off like a slipper; but good taste is indestructible; it is a compass that never errs. If your wife have it—well, it is possible she may be false to you; she is human, she is feminine; but she will never make you ridiculous, she

will never compromise you, and she will not romp in a cotillon till the morning sun shows the paint on her face washed away in the rain of her perspiration. Virtue is, after all, as Mme. de Montespan said, une chose tout purement géographique. It varies with the hemisphere like the human skin and the human hair; what is vile in one latitude is harmless in another. No philosophic person can put any trust in a thing which merely depends upon climate; but, Good Taste——"

The cab stopped at the club, and the Duc in his disquisition.

"Va faire la cour," he said, paternally, to his companion as they went through the doors of their Cercle. "I can assure you, mon cher, that the taste of Miladi is perfect."

"In dress, perhaps," assented Della Rocca.

"In everything. Va faire la cour."

Paolo, Duca della Rocca, was a very handsome man of the finest and most delicate type of beauty; he was very tall, and he carried himself with stateliness and grace; his face was grave, pensive, and poetic; in the largest assembly people who were strangers to him always looked at him, and asked, "Who is that?"

He was the head of a family, very ancient and distinguished, but very impoverished; in wars and civil wars all their possessions had drifted away from them piece by piece, hence, he was a great noble on a slender pittance. It had always been said to him, and of him as a matter of course, that he would mend his position by espousing a large fortune, and he had been brought up to regard such a transaction in the light of a painful but inevitable destiny.

But although he was now thirty-eight years of age, he had never seen, amongst the many young persons pointed out to him as possessing millions, any one to whom he could prevail upon himself to sell his old name and title.

The Great Republic inspires, as it is well known, a passion for social and titular distinctions in its enterprising sons and daughters, which is, to the original flunkeyism of the mother country, as Gloire de Dijon to a dog-rose, as a Reine Claude to a common blue plum. Nor are the pretty virgins whom the Atlantic wafts across, in any way afflicted with delicacy or hesitation if they can but see their way to getting what they want; and they strike the bargain, or their mothers do so for them, with a cynical candour as to their object which would almost stagger the manager of a Bureau de Mariage.

Many and various were the gold-laden damsels of the West, who were offered, or offered themselves, to him. But he could not induce himself;—his pride, or his taste, or his hereditary instincts, were too strong for him to be able to ally himself with rag and bone merchants from New York, or oil-strikers from Pennsylvania, or speculators from Wall Street.

No doubt it was very weak of him; a dozen men of the great old races of Europe married thus every year, but Paolo della Rocca loved his name, as a soldier does his flag, and he could not brave the idea of possibly transmitting to his children traits and taints of untraceable or ignoble inherited influences.

Over and over again he allowed himself to be the subject of discussion amongst those ladies whose especial pleasure it is to arrange this sort of matters; but when

from discussion it had been ready to pass into action, he had always murmured to his match-making friend:

"A little more time!—next year."

"Bah! ce n'est qu'une affaire de notaire," said his special protectress in these matters, a still charming Russian ex-ambassadress, who constantly wintered in Floralia, and who, having had him as a lover when he was twenty and she was thirty, felt quite a maternal interest in him still as to his marriage and prospects.

Della Rocca was too much a man of the world and of his country not to be well aware that she spoke the truth; it was only an affair for the notaries, like any other barter; still he put it off; it would have to be done one day, but there was no haste,—there would always be heiresses willing and eager to become the Duchess della Rocca, Princess of Palmarola, and Marchioness of Tavignano, as his roll of old titles ran.

And so year by year had gone by, and he vaguely imagined that he would in time meet what he wanted without any drawbacks: a delusion common to every one, and realized by no one.

Meanwhile, the life he led, if somewhat purposeless, was not disagreeable; being an Italian, he could live like a gentleman, with simplicity, and no effort to conceal his lack of riches; nor did he think his dignity imperilled because he did not get into debt for the sake of display; he would dine frugally without thinking himself dishonoured; refuse to join in play without feeling degraded; and look the finest gentleman in Europe without owing his tailor a bill.

For other matters he was somewhat *désœuvré*. He had fought, like most other young men of that time, in

the campaign of '59, but the result disappointed him; and he was at heart too honest and too disdainful to find any place for himself in that struggle between cunning and corruption, of which the political life of our regenerated Italy is at present composed. Besides, he was also too indolent. So for his amusement he went to the world, and chiefly to the world of great ladies; and for his duties made sufficient for himself out of the various interests of the neglected old estates which he had inherited; for the rest he was a man of the world; that he had a perfect manner, all society knew; whether he had character as well, nobody cared; that he had a heart at all, was only known to himself, his peasantry, and a few women.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning the sun shone brilliantly; the sky was blue; the wind was a very gentle breeze from the sea; Lady Hilda's breakfast chocolate was well made; the tea-roses and the heliotrope almost hid the magenta furniture and the gilded plaster consoles, and the staring mirrors. They had sent her in a new story of Octave Feuillet; M. de St. Louis had forwarded her a new volume of charming verse by Sully Prudhomme, only sold on the Boulevards two days before, with a note of such grace and wit that it ought to have been addressed to Elysium for Mme. de Sévigné; the post brought her only one letter, which announced that her brother, Lord Clairvaux, would come thither to please her, after the Newmarket Spring Meeting, or perhaps before, since he had to see "Major Fridolin" in Paris.

On the whole, the next morning Lady Hilda, looking out of the hotel window, decided to stay in Floralia.

She ordered her carriage out early, and drove hither and thither to enjoy tranquilly the innumerable treasures of all the arts in which the city of Floralia is so rich.

A Monsignore whom she knew well, learned, without pedantry, and who united the more vivacious accomplishments of the virtuoso to the polished softness of the churchman, accompanied her. The Clairvaux people from time immemorial had been good Catholics.

Lady Hilda for her part never troubled her head about those things, but she thought unbelief was very bad form,

and that to throw over your family religion was an impertinence to your ancestors. Some things in the ceremonials of her church grated on her aesthetic and artistic ideas, but then these things she attributed to the general decadence of the whole age in taste.

Her Monsignore went home to luncheon with her, and made himself as agreeable as a courtly churchman always is to every one; and afterwards she studied the Penal Settlement more closely by calling on those leaders of it whose cards lay in a heap in her anteroom, and amused herself with its mind and manners, its attributes and antecedents.

"After all, the only people in any country that one can trust oneself to know are the natives of it," she said to herself, as she went to the weekly "day" of the infinitely charming Marchesa del Trasimene, *nata* Da Bolsena, where she met Della Rocca and M. de St. Louis, as everybody meets everybody else, morning, afternoon, and evening, fifty times in the twenty-four hours in Floralia, the results being antipathy or sympathy in a fatal degree.

In her gyrations she herself excited extreme attention and endless envy, especially in the breasts of those unhappy outsiders whom she termed the Penal Settlement.

There was something about her!—Worth, Pingât and La Ferrière dressed the Penal Settlement, or it said they did. Carlo Maremma always swore that there was a little dressmaker who lived opposite his stable who could have told sad truths about many of these Paris-born toilettes; but no doubt Maremma was wrong, because men know nothing about these things, and are not aware that a practised eye can tell the sweep of Worth's scis-

sors under the shoulderblades as surely as a connoisseur recognizes the hand of Boul or Vernis Martin on a cabinet or an *étui.* At any rate, the Penal Settlement swore it was adorned by Worth, Pingât and La Ferrière in all the glories and eccentricities imaginable of confections, *unies* and *mélangées,* Directoire and Premier Empire, Juive and Louis Quinze; and if talking about a theory could prove it, certainly they proved that they bore all Paris on their persons.

But there was something about *her*—it was difficult to say what; perhaps it was in the tip of her Pompadour boot, or perhaps it hid in the black widths of her skirt, or perhaps it lurked in the black sable fur of her dolman, but a something that made them feel there was a gulf never to be passed between them and this world-famed *élégante.*

Lady Hilda would have said her secret lay in her always being just a quarter of an hour in advance of fashion. She was always the first person to be seen, in what six weeks afterwards was the rage: and when the rage came, then Lady Hilda had dropped the fashion. Hence she was the perpetual despair of all her sex—a distinction which she was quite human enough to enjoy in a contemptuous sort of way; as contemptuous of herself as of others; for she had a certain vague generosity and largeness of mind which lifted her above mean and small emotions in general.

She had been steeped in the world, as people call that combination of ennui, excitement, selfishness, fatigue, and glitter, which forms the various delights of modern existence, till it had penetrated her through and through, as a petrifying stream does the supple bough put in it.

But there were little corners in her mind which the petrifaction had not reached.

This morning—it was half-past five o'clock in a November afternoon, and pitch dark, but of course it was morning still as nobody had dined, the advent of soup and sherry bringing the only meridian recognized in society—the Lady Hilda, refreshed with a cup of tea from the samovar of her friend the Princess Olga Schouvaloff, who came yearly to her palace in the historical river-street of historical Floralia, and having been assured by Princess Olga, that if they kept quite amongst themselves, and never knew anybody else but the Floralian Russian and German nobility, and steadfastly refused to allow anybody else to be presented to them, Floralia was bearable—nay, even really agreeable,—she got into her coupé, and was driven through the gloom to her hotel.

Her head servant made her two announcements:—Madame de Caviare had arrived that morning, and hoped to see her before dinner.

Lady Hilda's brows frowned a little.

The Duca della Rocca had sent these flowers.

Lady Hilda's eyes smiled a little.

They were only some cyclamens fresh from the country, in moss. She had regretted to him the day before that those lovely simple wood flowers could not be found at florists' shops nor in flower women's baskets.

After all, she said to herself, it did not matter that Mila had come; she was silly and not very proper, and a nuisance altogether; but Mila was responsible for her own sins, and sometimes could be amusing. So the Lady Hilda, in a good-humoured and serene frame of

mind, crossed the corridor to the apartments her cousin had taken just opposite to her own.

"He is certainly very striking looking—like a Vandyke picture," she thought to herself irrelevantly, as she tapped at her cousin's door; those cyclamens had pleased her; yet she had let thousands of the loveliest and costliest bouquets wither in her anteroom every year of her life, without deigning to ask or heed who were even the senders of them.

"Come in, if it's you, dear," said Madame Mila, ungrammatically and vaguely, in answer to the tap.

The Countess de Caviare was an Englishwoman, and a cousin, one of the great West country Trehillyons whom everybody knows, her mother having been a Clairvaux. She had been grandly married in her first season to a very high and mighty and almost imperial Russian, himself a most good-humoured and popular person, who killed all his horses with fast driving, gambled very heavily, and never amused himself anywhere so well as in the little low dancing places round Paris.

Madame Mila, as her friends always called her, was as pretty a little woman as could be imagined, who enamelled herself to such perfection that she had a face of fifteen, on the most fashionable and wonderfully costumed of bodies; she was very fond of her cousin Hilda, because she could borrow so much money of her, and she had come to Floralia this winter because in Paris there was a rumour that she had cheated at cards—false, of course, but still odious.

If she had made a little pencil mark on some of the aces, where was the harm in that?

She almost always played with the same people, and

they had won heaps of money of her. Whilst those horrid creatures in the city and on the bourse were allowed to "rig the market," and nobody thought the worse of them for spreading false news to send their shares up or down, why should not one poor little woman try to help on Chance a little bit at play?

She was always in debt, though she admitted that her husband allowed her liberally. She had eighty thousand francs a year by her settlements to spend on herself, and he gave her another fifty thousand to do as she pleased with: on the whole about one half what he allowed to Blanche Souris, of the Château Gaillard Theatre.

She had had six children, three were living and three were dead; she thought herself a good mother, because she gave her wet-nurses ever so many silk gowns, and when she wanted the children for a fancy ball or a drive, always saw that they were faultlessly dressed, and besides she always took them to Trouville.

She had never had any grief in her life, except the loss of the Second Empire, and even that she got over when she found that flying the Red Cross flag had saved her hotel, without so much as a teacup being broken in it, that MM. Worth and Offenbach were safe from all bullets, and that society, under the Septennate, promised to be every bit as *leste* as under the Empire.

In a word, Madame Mila was a type of the women of her time.

The women who go semi-nude in an age which has begun to discover that the nude in sculpture is very immoral; who discuss "Tue-la" in a generation which de-

crees Molière to be coarse, and Beaumont and Fletcher indecent; who have the *Journal pour Rire* on their tables in a day when no one who respects himself would name the Harlot's Progress; who read Baudelaire and patronize Térésa and Schneider in an era which finds "Don Juan" gross, and Shakespeare far too plain; who strain all their energies to rival Mlles. Rose Thé and La Petite Boulotte in everything; who go shrimping or oyster-hunting on fashionable seashores, with their legs bare to the knee; who go to the mountains with confections, high heels, and gold tipped canes, shriek over their gambling as the dawn reddens over the Alps, and know no more of the glories of earth and sky, of sunrise and sunset, than do the porcelain pots that hold their paint, or the silver dressing-box that carries their hair-dye.

Women who are in convulsions one day, and on the top of a drag the next; who are in hysterics for their lovers at noon-day, and in ecstasies over baccarat at midnight; who laugh in little nooks together over each other's immoralities, and have a moral code so elastic that it will pardon anything except innocence; who gossip over each other's dresses, and each other's passions, in the selfsame, self-satisfied chirp of contentment, and who never resent anything on earth except any eccentric suggestion that life could be anything except a perpetual fête à la Watteau in a perpetual blaze of limelight.

Pain?—Are there not chloral and a flattering doctor? Sorrow?—Are there not a course at the Baths, play at Monte Carlo, and new cases from Worth? Shame?—Is it not a famine fever which never comes near a well laden table? Old age?—Is there not white and red paint, and heads of dead hair, and even false bosoms?

Death?—Well, no doubt there is death, but they do not realize it; they hardly believe in it, they think about it so little.

There is something unknown somewhere to fall on them some day that they dread vaguely, for they are terrible cowards. But they worry as little about it as possible. They give the millionth part of what they possess away in its name to whatever church they belong to, and they think they have arranged quite comfortably for all possible contingencies hereafter.

If it makes things safe, they will head bazaars for the poor, or wear black in holy week, turn lottery-wheels for charity, or put on fancy dresses in the name of benevolence, or do any little amiable trifle of that sort. But as for changing their lives, *pas si bête!*

A bird in the hand they hold worth two in the bush; and though your birds may be winged on strong desire, and your bush the burning parterre of Moses, they will have none of them.

These women are not all bad; oh, no! they are like sheep, that is all. If it were fashionable to be virtuous, very likely they would be so. If it were *chic* to be devout, no doubt they would pass their life on their knees. But, as it is, they know that a flavour of vice is as necessary to their reputation as great ladies, as sorrel-leaves to soup à la bonne femme. They affect a license if they take it not.

They are like the barber, who said, with much pride, to Voltaire, "Je ne suis qu'un pauvre diable de perruquier, mais je ne crois pas en Dieu plus que les autres."

They may be worth very little, but they are desperately afraid that you should make such a mistake as to think

them worth anything at all. You are not likely, if you know them. Still, they are apprehensive.

Though one were to arise from the dead to preach to them, they would only make of him a nine days' wonder, and then laugh a little, and yawn a little, and go on in their own paths.

Out of the eater came forth meat, and from evil there may be begotten good; but out of nullity there can only come nullity. They have wadded their ears, and though Jeremiah wailed of desolation, or Isaiah thundered the wrath of Heaven, they would not hear,—they would go on looking at each other's dresses.

What could Paul himself say that would change them?

You cannot make sawdust into marble; you cannot make sea-sand into gold. "Let us alone," is all they ask; and it is all that you could do, though the force and flame of Horeb were in you.

Mila, Countess de Caviare having arrived early in the morning and remained invisible all day, had awakened at five to a cup of tea, an exquisite dressing-gown, and her choicest enamel; she now gave many bird-like kisses to her cousin, heaped innumerable endearments upon her, and hearing there was nothing to do, sent out for a box at the French Theatre.

"It is wretched acting," said the Lady Hilda; "I went the other night but I did not stay half-an-hour."

"That of course, ma chère," said Madame Mila; "but we shall be sure to see people we know,—heaps of people."

"Such as they are," said the Lady Hilda.

"At any rate it is better than spending an evening alone. I never spent an evening alone in my life," said

Mme. de Caviare, who could no more live without a crowd about her than she could sleep without chlorodyne, or put on a petticoat without two or three maids' assistance.

The French company in Floralia is usually about the average of the weakly patchwork troops of poor actors that pass on third-rate little stages in the French departments; but Floralia, feminine and fashionable, flocks to the French company because it can rely on something *tant soit peu hazardé,* and is quite sure not to be bored with decency, and if by any oversight or bad taste the management should put any serious sort of piece on the stage, it can always turn its back to the stage and whisper to its lovers, or chatter shrilly to its allies.

They went into their box as the second act ended of *Mme. de Scabreuse;* a play of the period, written by a celebrated author; in which the lady married her nephew, and finding out that he was enamoured of her daughter, the offspring of a first marriage, bought poison for them both, and then suddenly changing her mind, with magnificent magnanimity drank it herself, and blessed the lovers as she died in great agonies.

It had been brought out in Paris with enormous success, and as Lady Hilda and the Countess had both seen it half-a-dozen times they could take no interest in it.

"You *would* come!" said the former, raising her eyebrows and seating herself so as to see nothing whatever of the stage and as little as possible of the house.

"Of course," replied Madame Mila, whose lorgnon was ranging hither and thither, like a general's spy-glass before a battle. "There was nothing else to do—at least you said there was nothing. Look! some of those

women have actually got the œuf de Pâques corsage—good heaven!—those went out last year, utterly, utterly! Ah, there is Lucia San Luca—what big emeralds—and there is Maria Castelfidardo, how old she is looking. That is Lady Featherleigh—you remember that horrid scandal?—Yes, I hear they do visit her here. How handsome Luisa Ottoseccoli looks; powder becomes her so; her son is a pretty boy—oh, you never stoop to boys; you are wrong; nothing amuses you like a boy; how they believe in one! There is that Canadian woman who tried to get into notice in Paris two seasons ago—you remember?—they make her quite Crême in this place—the idea! She is dressed very well, I dare say if she were always dumb she might pass. She never would have been heard of even here, only Attavante pushed her right and left, bribed the best people to her parties, and induced all his other *tendresses* to send her cards. In love! of course not! Who is in love with a face like a Mohican squaw's and a squeak like a goose's? But they are immensely rich; at least they have mountains of ready money; he must have suffered dreadfully before he made her dress well. Teach her grammar, in any language, he never will. There is the old Duchess—why, she was a centenarian when we were babies—but they say she plays every atom as keenly as ever—nobody can beat her lace either—look at that Spanish point. There are a few decent people here this winter; not many though; I think it would have been wiser to have stopped at Nice. Ah, mon cher, comment ça va?—tell me, Maurice, who is that woman in black with good diamonds, there, with Sampierdareno and San Marco?"

"Maurice," pressing her pretty hand, sank down on to the hard bench behind her armchair, and insinuated gracefully that the woman in black with good diamonds was not "d'une vertu assez forte," to be noticed by or described to such ladies as Mila, Countess de Caviare; but since identification of her was insisted on, proceeded to confess that she was no less a person than the wild Duke of Stirling's Gloria.

"Ah! is *that* Gloria!" said Madame, with the keenest interest, bringing her lorgnon to bear instantly. "How curious! I never chanced to see her before. How quiet she looks, and how plainly she is dressed."

"I am afraid we have left Gloria and her class no other way of being singular!" said the Lady Hilda, who had muttered her welcome somewhat coldly to Maurice.

Maurice, Vicomte des Gommeux, was a young Parisian, famous for leading cotillons and driving piebalds; he followed Mme. de Caviare with the regularity of her afternoon shadow; was as much an institution with her as her anodynes; and much more useful than her courier. To avoid all appearances that might set a wicked world talking, he generally arrived in a city about twenty-four hours after her, and, as she was a woman of good-breeding who insisted on *les mœurs,* always went to another hotel. He had held his present post actually so long as three years, and there were as yet no signs of his being dismissed and replaced, for he was very devoted, very obedient, very weak, saw nothing that he was intended not to see, and was very adroit at rolling cigarettes.

"Il est si bon enfant!" said the Count de Caviare, to everybody; he really was grateful to the young man,

some of whose predecessors had much disturbed his wife's temper and his own personal peace.

"Bon soir, Mesdames," said the Duc de St. Louis, entering the box. "Comtesse, charmé de vous voir—Miladi, à vos pieds. What a wretched creature that is playing Julie de Scabreuse. I blush for my country. When I was a young man the smallest theatre in France would not have endured that woman. There was a public then with proper feeling for the histrionic as for every other art; a bad gesture or a false intonation was hissed by every audience, were that audience only composed of workmen and work girls; but now——"

"May one enter, Mesdames?" asked his friend, Della Rocca.

"One may—if you will only shut the door. Thanks for the cyclamens," said the Lady Hilda, with a little of the weariness going off her delicate, proud face.

Della Rocca took the seat behind her, as the slave Maurice surrendered his to M. de St. Louis.

"Happy flowers! I found them in my own woods this morning," he said, as he took his seat. "You do not seem much amused, Madame."

"Amused! The play is odious. Even poor Desclée's genius could only give it a horrible fascination."

"It has the worst fault of all, it is unnatural."

"Yes; it is very curious, but the French will have so much vice in the drama, and the English must have so much virtue, that a natural or possible play is an impossibility now upon either stage."

"You looked more interested in the Majolica this morning——"

"How, did you see me?"

"I was passing through the tower of the Podestà on business. Is it not wonderful——our old pottery? It is intensely to be regretted that Ginori and Carocci imitate it so closely; it vulgarizes a thing whose chief beauty after all is association and age."

"Yes; what charm there is in a marriage plate of Maestro Giorgio's, or a sweetmeat dish of your Orazio Fontana's! But there is very scanty pleasure in reproductions of them, however clever these may be, such as Pietro Gay sends out to Paris and Vienna Exhibitions."

"You mean, there can be no mind in an imitation?"

"Of course; I would rather have the crudest original thing than the mere galvanism of the corpse of a dead genius. I would give a thousand paintings by Froment, Damousse, or any of the finest living artists of Sèvres, for one piece by old Van der Meer of Delft; but I would prefer a painting on Sèvres done yesterday by Froment or Damousse or even any much less famous worker, provided only it had originality in it, to the best reproduction of a Van der Meer that modern manufacturers could produce."

"I think you are right; but I fear our old pottery painters were not very original. They copied from the pictures and engravings of Mantegna, Raffaelle, Marcantonio, Marco di Ravenna, Beatricius, and a score of others."

"The application was original, and the sentiment they brought to it. Those old artists put so much heart into their work."

"Because when they painted a *stemma* on the glaze they had still feudal faith in nobility, and when they painted a Madonna or Ecce Homo they had still child-

like belief in divinity. What does the pottery painter of today care for the coat of arms or the religious subject he may be commissioned to execute for a dinner service or a chapel? It may be admirable painting—if you give a very high price—but it will still be only manufacture."

"Then what pleasant lives those pottery painters of the early days must have led! They were never long stationary. They wandered about decorating at their fancy, now here and now there; now a vase for a pharmacy, and now a stove for a king. You find German names on Italian ware, and Italian names on Flemish grès; the Nuremberger would work in Venice, the Dutchman would work in Rouen."

"Sometimes however they were accused of sorcery; the great potter, Hans Kraut, you remember, was feared by his townsmen as possessed by the devil, and was buried ignominiously outside the gates, in his nook of the Black Forest. But on the whole they were happy, no doubt: men of simple habits and of worthy lives."

"You care for art yourself, M. Della Rocca?"

There came a gleam of interest in her handsome, languid hazel eyes, as she turned them upon him.

"Every Italian does," he answered her. "I do not think we are ever, or I think, if ever, very seldom connoisseurs in the way that your Englishman and Frenchman is so. We are never very learned as to styles and dates; we cannot boast the huckster's eye of the northern bric-à-brac hunter; it is quite another thing with us; we love art as children their nurses' tales and cradle songs; it is a familiar affection with us, and affection is never very analytical; the Robbia over the chapel-door, the apostle-pot that the men in the stables drink out of; the

University of Winnipeg Portage & Balmoral Winnipeg, Manitoba, Cana

Sodoma or the Beato Angelico that hangs before our eyes daily as we dine; the old bronze *secchia* that we wash our hands in as boys in the Loggia—these are all so homely and dear to us that we grow up with a love for them all as natural as our love for our mothers. You will say the children of all rich people see beautiful and ancient things from their birth; so they do, but not *as* we see them—here they are too often degraded to the basest household uses, and made no more account of than the dust which gathers on them; but that very neglect of them makes them the more kindred to us. Art elsewhere is the guest of the salon—with us she is the playmate of the infant and the serving-maid of the peasant: the mules may drink from an Etruscan sarcophagus, and the pigeons be fed from a *patina* of the twelfth century."

Lady Hilda listened with the look of awakened interest still in her large eyes; he spoke in his own tongue, and with feeling and grace; it was new to her to find a man with whom art was an emotion instead of an opinion.

The art world she had met with was one that was very positive, very eclectic, very hypercritical, very highly cultured; it had many theories and elegant phrases; it laid down endless doctrines, and found pleasure in endless disputations. Whenever she had tired of the world of fashion, this was the world she had turned to; it had imbued her with knowledge of art, and immeasurable contempt for those to whom art was a dead letter; but art had remained with her rather an intellectual dissipation than a tenderness of sentiment.

"As you care for these things, Madame," continued Della Rocca, with hesitation, "might I one day hope that you would honour my poor villa? It has little else

left in it; but there are still a few rare pieces of Gubbio and Urbino and Faenza, and I have a Calvary which, if not by Lucca himself, is certainly by Andrea della Robbia."

"I shall be glad to see them. Your villa is near?"

"About ten miles' distance, up in the hills. It was once a great stronghold as well as palace. Now it can boast no interest save such as may go with fallen fortunes. For more than a century we have been too poor to be able to do any more than keep wind and water out of it; and it had been cleared before my time of almost everything of value. Happily, however, the chestnut woods outside it have not been touched. They shroud its nakedness."

"Your villa, Della Rocca?" cried Madame de Caviare, who had known him for several years. "I have never seen it; we will drive out there some day when the cold winds are gone——"

"Vous me comblez de bontés," he answered, with a low bow. "Alas, Madame, there is very little that will repay you: it is hardly more than a ruin. But if you and Milady will indeed honour it——"

"It is a very fine place still," said the Duc de St. Louis, a little impatiently. "It has suffered in sieges; and is by so much the more interesting. For myself, I endure very much pain from having a whole house, and one built no later than 1730. My great-grandfather pulled down the noble old castle, built at the same time as Château Gaillard—imagine the barbarism!—and employed the ponderous *rocaille* of Oppenord to replace it. It is very curious, but loss of taste in the nobles has al-

ways been followed by a revolution of the mob. The *décadence* always ushers in the democracy."

"We may well be threatened then in this city with universal equality!" said the Lady Hilda, hiding a small yawn behind her fan.

"Nay, Madame," said Della Rocca. "In this day the nobles do not even do so much as to lead a wrong taste; they accept and adopt every form of it, as imposed on them by their tailors, their architects, their clubs, and their municipalities, as *rocaille* was imposed by the cabinet-makers."

"How fearfully serious you all are!" said Madame de Caviare. "There is that dreadful Canadian woman standing up—what rubies! how fond vulgar women always are of rubies. That *passe-partout* of hers is rather pretty; gold thread on *blondine* satin, is it not, Hilda? My glass is not very strong——"

Lady Hilda looked through her glass, and decided the important point in the affirmative.

"How she is rouged!" pursued the Countess. "I am sure Altavante did not lay *that* on; he is much too artistic. Maurice, have you a cigarette?"

"It is not allowed, ma chère," said the Lady Hilda.

"Pooh!" said Madame de Caviare, accepting a little delicate paper roll. "It was very kind of you, Hilda, to remind me of that; you wished me to enjoy it. Won't you have one too?"

Lady Hilda said "No" with her fan.

"If the Rocaille brought the Revolution, Duc," she asked, "What will our smoking bring?—the end of the world?"

"It will bring animosity of the sexes, abolition of the marriage laws, and large increase of paralysis," replied M. de St. Louis with great decision.

"You have answered me without a compliment—what flattery to my intelligence."

"Miladi, I never flatter you. I am not in the habit of imitating all the world."

"You look severe, Della Rocca," said Madame Mila. "Do you disapprove of women smoking?"

"Madame, a woman of grace lends grace to all she does, no doubt."

"That is to say, you don't approve it?"

"Madame, I merely doubt whether Leonardo would have painted Mona Lisa had she smoked."

"What a good idea you give me! I will be painted by Millais or Cabanel, smoking. It will be novel. The cigar shall be in my mouth. I will send you the first photograph. Ah! there is Nordlingen; he will come over here, and he is the greatest bore in Europe. You know what your King here said, when Nordlingen had bored him at three audiences about Heaven knows what—'I never knew the use of sentinels before; let that man be shot if he ask audience again!' We cannot shoot him; let us go to supper. Duc, you will follow us, with M. des Gommeux?—and you, too, Della Rocca? There is that odious Canadian woman going; let us make haste; I should like to see that blondine cloak close; I shall know whether it looks like Worth or Pingât."

She passed out on the Duc's arm, and the Lady Hilda accepted Della Rocca's, while the well-trained Maurice, who knew his duties, rushed to find the footman in the vestibule, and to arrest another gilded youth and kindred

spirit, a M. des Poisseux, whom Madame Mila had espied in the crowd, and charged him to bring with him to supper. Madame Mila preferred, to all the world, the young men of her world of five and twenty or less; they had no mind whatever, they had not character enough to be jealous, and they were as full of the last new scandals as any dowager of sixty.

"They talk of the progress of this age: contrast M. de St. Louis with M. des Gommeux and M. des Poisseux!" said the Lady Hilda, with her little contemptuous smile.

Della Rocca laughed.

"You make me for the first time, Madame, well content to belong to what the Gommeux and the Poisseux would call a past generation. But there are not many like our friend the Duc; he has stepped down to us from the terraces of Marly; I am certain he went to sleep one night after a gavotte with Montespan, and has only just awakened."

The supper was gay and bright; Lady Hilda, rejecting chicken and champagne, and accepting only ice-water and cigarettes, deigned to be amusing, though sarcastic, and Madame Mila was always in one of the two extremes—either syncope, sal volatile, and hysterics, or laughter, frolic, smoke and *risqué* stories.

She and her sisterhood spend their lives in this see-saw; the first state is for the mornings, when they remember their losses at play, their lover's looks at other women, the compromising notes they have written, and how much—too much to be safe—their maids knew of them; the second state is for the evenings, when they have their war-paint on, have taken a little nip of some

stimulant at afternoon tea, are going to half-a-dozen houses between midnight and dawn, and are quite sure their lovers never even see that any other women exist.

"He could not have a better illustration of the difference between a woman with taste and a woman without it," thought the Duc de St. Louis, surveying the two; the Countess had a million or two of false curls in a tower above her pretty tiny face, was almost as *décolletée* as a Greuze picture, chirped the fashionable slang of the boulevards and salons in the shrillest and swiftest of voices, and poured fourth slanders that were more diverting than decorous.

Lady Hilda was dressed like a picture of Marie Antoinette, in 1780; her rich hair was lifted from her low fair forehead in due keeping with her costume, she swept aside her cousin's naughty stories with as much tact as contempt, and spoke a French which Marie Antoinette could have recognized as the language in which Voltaire once scoffed, and André Chenier sighed. To be sure, she did smoke a little, but then even the most perfect taste cannot quite escape the *cachet* of its era.

"It was not necessary, my friend, to say that your place was so poor," said M. de St. Louis, as they went out of the hotel together; he had known his companion from boyhood.

"I am not ashamed of my poverty," said Della Rocca, somewhat coldly. "Besides," he added, with a laugh which had not much mirth in it, "our poverty is as well known as that of the city. I think the most dishonest Della Rocca could not conceal it by any adroitness, any more than Floralia could conceal her public debt."

"That may be, but neither you nor the town need proclaim the state of your affairs," said the Duc, who never gave up an opinion. "You should let her be interested in you before you make it so evident; such silence is quite permissible. You need say nothing; you need hide nothing; you need only let things alone."

"My dear Duc," said Della Rocca, with a laugh that had melancholy in it and some irritation, "think for one moment of that woman's position, and say could anything ever induce her to change it—except one thing. Riches could add nothing to her; the highest rank could scarcely be any charm to her; she has everything she can want or wish for;—if she had the power of wishing left, which I doubt. The only spell that might enchain her would be love, if she have any capacity to feel it, which I doubt also. Well—granted love aroused,—what would poverty or riches in her lover matter to one who has secured for ever a golden pedestal of her own from which to survey the woes of the world? She refused the Prince of Deutschland; that I know, since he told me himself; and men do not boast of rejections;—what position, pray, would ever tempt her since she refused Deutschland? and he has all personal attractions, too, as well as his future crown."

"Still, granting all that, to make your lack of fortune so very conspicuous is to render your purpose conspicuous also, and to draw her attention to it unwisely," said the Duc, who viewed all these matters calmly, as a kind of mixture of diplomacy and business.

"Caro mio!" said Della Rocca lightly, as he descended the last step. "Be very sure that if I ever have such a

purpose, your Lady Hilda has too much wit not to perceive it in a day. But I have not such a purpose. I do not like a woman who smokes."

And with a good night he walked away to his own house, which was a street or two distant. The Duc chuckled, nowise discomfited.

"An Italian always swears he will never do the thing he means to do in an hour," the Duc reflected as he got in his cab.

The Della Rocca Palace was let to many tenants and in various divisions; he himself retained only a few chambers looking upon the old quiet green garden, high-walled, dark with ilex, and musical with fountains.

He crossed the silent courts, mounted the vast black stairways, and entered his solitary rooms. There was a lamp burning; and his dog got up and welcomed him. He slipped on an old velvet smoking coat, lighted a cigar, and sat down: the councils and projects of M. de St. Louis were not so entirely rejected by him as he had wished the Duc to suppose.

He admired her; he did not approve her; he was not even sure that he liked her in any way; but he could not but see that here at last was the marriage which would bring the resurrection of all his fortunes.

Neither did he feel any of the humility which he had expressed to M. de St. Louis. Though she might be as cold as people all said she was, he had little fear, if he once endeavoured, that he would fail in making his way into her graces. With an Italian, love is too perfect a science for him to be uncertain of its results.

Besides, he believed that he detected a different character in her to what the world thought, and she also

thought, was her own. He thought men had all failed with her because they had not gone the right way to work. After all, to make a woman in love with you was easy enough. At least he had always found it so.

She was a woman, too, of unusual beauty, and of supreme grace, and a great alliance; her money would restore him to the lost power of his ancestors, and save a mighty and stainless name from falling into that paralysis of poverty and that dust of obscurity, which are, sooner or later, its utter extinction. She seemed cast across his path by a caress of Fortune, from which it would be madness to turn aside. True, he had a wholly different ideal for his wife; he disliked those world-famous *élegantes;* he disliked women who smoked, and knew their Paris as thoroughly as Houssaye or Dumas; he disliked the extravagant, artificial, empty, frivolous life they led; their endless chase after new excitements, and their insatiable appetite for *frissons nouveaux;* he disliked their literature, their habits, their cynicism, their ennui, their sensuality, and their dissipations; he knew them well, and disliked them in all things; what he desired in his wife were natural emotions, unworn innocence, serenity, simplicity, and freshness of enjoyment; though he was of the world, he did not care very much for it; he had a meditative, imaginative temperament, and the whirl of modern society was soon wearisome to him; on the other hand, he knew the world too well to want a woman beside him who knew it equally well.

On the whole, the project of M. de St. Louis repelled as much as it attracted him. Yet his wisdom told him that it was the marriage beyond all others which would best fulfil his destiny in the way which from his earliest

years he had been accustomed to regard as inevitable; and, moreover, there was something about her which charmed his senses, though his judgment feared and in some things his taste disapproved her.

Besides, to make so self-engrossed a woman love;—he smiled as he sat and smoked in the solitude of his great dim vaulted room, and then he sighed impatiently.

After all, it was not a *beau rôle* to woo a woman for the sheer sake of her fortune; and he was too true a gentleman not to know it. And what would money do for him if it were hers and not his?—it would only humiliate him,—he felt no taste for the position of a prince consort,—it would pass to his children certainly after him, and so raise up the old name to its olden dignity; but for himself——

He got up and walked to the window; the clear winter stars, large before morning, were shining through the iron bars and lozenged panes of the ancient casement; the fountain in the cortile was shining in the moonlight; the ducal coronet, carved in stone above the gateway, stood out whitely from the shadows.

"After all, she would despise me, and I should despise myself," he thought; the old coronet had been sadly battered in war, but it had never been chaffered and bought.

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT do you think of Della Rocca, Hilda," asked Madame Mila at the same hour that night, toasting her pink satin slipper before her dressing-room fire.

Lady Hilda yawned, unclasping her *rivière* of sapphires.

"He has a very good manner. There is some truth in what Olga Schouvaloff always maintains, that after an Italian all other men seem boors."

"I am sure Maurice is not a boor!" said the Countess, pettishly.

"Oh, no, my dear; he parts his hair in the middle, talks the last new, unintelligible, aristocratic *argot,* and has the charms of every actress and dancer in Paris catalogued clearly in a brain otherwise duly clouded, as fashion requires, by brandy in the morning and absinthe before dinner! Boors don't do those things nor yet get half as learned as to Mlle. Rose Thé and la Petite Boulotte."

Madame Mila reddened angrily.

"What spiteful things to say; he never looked at that hideous little Boulotte, or any of the horrible creatures, and he never drinks; he is a perfect gentleman."

"Not quite that, chère; if he had been he would never have let himself be called *bon enfant* by *your* husband!"

Madame Mila raged in passionate wrath for five minutes, and then began to cry a little, whimperingly.

Lady Hilda gathered up her *rivière,* took her candlestick, and bade her good night.

"It is no use making that noise, Mila," she said coolly. "You have always known what I think, but you prefer to be in the fashion; of course you must go on as you like; only please to remember,—don't let *me* see too much of Des Gommeux."

Madame Mila, left alone to the contemplation of her pink slippers, fumed and sulked and felt very angry indeed; but she had borrowed a thousand pounds some six or eight times from the Lady Hilda to pay her debts at play; and of course it was such a trifle that she had always forgotten to pay it again, because if ever she had any ready money there was always some jeweller, or man dressmaker, or creditor of some kind who would not wait; and then, though it was not her fault, because she played as high as she could any night she got a chance to do so, somehow or other she generally lost, and never had a single sou to spare;—so she muttered her rage to the pink slippers alone, and decided that it was never worth while to be put out about the Lady Hilda's ways."

"She is a bit of ice herself," she said to her slippers, and wondered how Lady Hilda or anybody else could object to what she did, or see any harm in it. Maurice always went to another hôtel.

Mme. Mila lived her life in a manner very closely resembling that of the horrible creature Mlles. Rose Thé and Boulotte; really, when compared by a cynic there was very little difference to be found between those persons and pretty Madame Mila. But Rose Thé and Bou-

lotte of course were creatures, and she was a very great little lady, and went to all the courts and embassies in Europe, and was sought and courted by the very best and stiffest people, being very *chic* and very rich, and very lofty in every way, and very careful to make Maurice go to a different hôtel.

She had had twenty Maurices in her time indeed, but then the Count de Caviare never complained, and was careful to drive with her in the Bois, and pass at least three months of each year under the same roof with her, so that nobody could say anything; it being an accepted axiom with Society that when the husband does not object to his own dishonour, there is no dishonour at all in the matter for any one. If he be sensitive to it then indeed you must cut his wife, and there will be nothing too bad to be said of her; but if he only do but connive at his own shame himself, then all is quite right, and everything is as it should be.

When the Prince of Cracow, with half Little Russia in his possession, entertains the beautiful Lady Lightwood at a banquet at his villa at Frascati, Richmond, or Auteuil, a score of gilded lackeys shout "La voiture de Madame la Comtesse!" the assembled guests receive her sweet good night, the Prince of Cracow bows low, and thanks her for the honour she has done to him; she goes out at the hall door, and the carriage bowls away with loud crash and fiery steeds, and rolls on its way out of the park-gates. Society is quite satisfied. Society knows very well that a million roubles find their yearly way into the empty pockets of Lord Lightwood, and that a little later the carriage will sweep round again to a side-door hidden under the laurels wide open, and receive the

beautiful Lady Lightwood: but what is that to Society? It has seen her drive away; that is quite sufficient, everybody is satisfied with that.

If you give Society very good dinners, Society will never be so ill-bred as to see that side-door under your laurels.

Do drive out at the hall-door;—do;—for sake of les Bienséances—that is all Society asks of you; there are some things Society feels it owes to Itself, and this is one of them.

Of course, whether you come back again or not, can be nobody's business.

Society can swear to the fact of the hall-door.

Madame Mila was very attentive to the matter of the hall-door; indeed, abhorred a scandal; it always made everything uncomfortable. She was always careful of appearances. Even if you had called on her unexpectedly, Des Gommeux was always in an inner room, unseen, and you could declare with a clear conscience that you never found him alone with her, were the oath ever required in any drawing-room in defence of her character. Of course, you have no sort of business with who or what may be in inner rooms; Society does not require you to search a house as if you were a detective.

If you can say airily, "Oh, there's nothing in it; I never see him there," Society believes you, and is quite satisfied: that is, if it wish to believe you; if it do not wish, nothing would ever satisfy it. No, not though there rose one from the dead to bear witness.

Madame Mila would not have done anything to jeopardize her going to Courts, and having all the Em-

bassies to show her jewels in, for anything that any man in the whole world could have offered her.

Madame Mila thought a woman who left her husband and made a scandal, a horrid creature; nay, she was worse, she was a Blunder, and by her blunder made a great deal of unpleasantness for other and wiser women. After a stupid, open thing of that kind, Society always gets so dreadfully prudish for about three months, that it is disagreeable for everybody. To run off with a man, and lose your settlements, and very likely have to end in a boarding-house in Boulogne?—could anything be more idiotic?

Madame Mila thought that a woman so forgetting herself deserved even a worse fate than the boarding-house. Madame Mila, who was quite content that her husband should make a fool of himself about Blanche Souris, or anybody else, so long as he walked arm-in-arm now and then with Des Gommeux, and called him "mon cher,"—was indeed in every iota the true Femme Galante of the nineteenth century.

The Femme Galante has passed through many various changes, in many countries. The dames of the Decamerone were unlike the fair athlete-seekers of the days of Horace; and the powdered coquettes of the years of Molière, were sisters only by the kinship of a common vice to the frivolous and fragile faggot of impulses, that is called Frou-frou.

The Femme Galante has always been a feature in every age; poets, from Juvenal to Musset, have railed at her; artists, from Titian to Winterhalter, have painted her; dramatists, from Aristophanes to Congreve and Dumas Fils, have pointed their arrows at her;

satirists, from Archilochus, and Simonides to Hogarth and Gavarni, have poured out their aqua-fortis for her. But the real Femme Galante of today has been missed hitherto.

Frou-frou, who stands for her, is not in the least the true type. Frou-frou is a creature that can love, can suffer, can repent, can die. She is false in sentiment and in art, but she is tender after all; poor, feverish, wistful, changeful morsel of humanity. A slender, helpless, breathless, and frail thing, who, under one sad, short sin, sinks down to death.

But Frou-frou is in no sense the true Femme Galante of her day. Frou-frou is much more a fancy than a fact. It is not Frou-frou that Molière would have handed down to other generations in enduring ridicule, had he been living now. To her he would have doffed his hat with dim eyes; what he would have fastened for all time in his pillory would have been a very different, and far more conspicuous, offender.

The Femme Galante, who has neither the scruples nor the follies of poor Frou-frou, who neither forfeits her place nor leaves her lord; who has studied adultery as one of the fine arts and made it one of the domestic virtues; who takes her wearied lover to her friends' houses as she takes her muff or her dog, and teaches her sons and daughters to call him by familiar names; who writes to the victim of her passions with the same pen that calls her boy home from school; and who smooths her child's curls with the same fingers that stray over her lover's lips; who challenges the world to find a flaw in her, and who smiles serene at her husband's table on a society she is careful to conciliate; who has woven the most

sacred ties and most unholy pleasures into so deft a braid, that none can say where one commences or the other ends; who uses the sanctity of her maternity to cover the lawlessness of her license; and who, incapable alike of the self abandonment of love or of the self-sacrifice of duty, has not even such poor, cheap honour as, in the creatures of the streets, may make guilt loyal to its dupe and partner.

This is the Femme Galante of the passing century, who, with her hand on her husband's arm, babbles of her virtue in complacent boast; and ignoring such a vulgar word as Sin, talks with a smile of Friendship. Beside her Frou-frou were innocence itself, Marion de l'Orme were honesty, Manon Lescaut were purity, Cleopatra were chaste, and Faustine were faithful.

She is the female Tartuffe of seduction, the Précieuse Ridicule of passion, the parody of Love, the standing gibe of Womanhood.

CHAPTER V

THE next day the Duca della Rocca left cards on Lady Hilda and the Comtesse de Caviare; and then for a fortnight never went near either of them except to exchange a few words with them in other people's houses. M. de St. Louis, who was vastly enamoured of his project, because it was his project (what better reason has anybody?) was irritated and in despair.

"You fly in the face of Fate!" he said, with much impatience.

Della Rocca laughed.

"There is no such person as Fate—she perished with all the rest of the Pagan world when we put up our first gas-lamp. The two I regret most of them all are Faunus and Picus; nowadays we make Faunus into a railway contractor, and shoot Picus for the market-stall."

"You are very romantic," said the Duc, with serene contempt. "It is an unfortunate quality; and I confess," he added, with a sigh, as if confessing a blemish in a favourite horse, "that, perhaps, she is a little deficient in the other extreme, a little too cold, a little too unimpressionable; there is absolutely no shadow of cause to suppose she ever felt the slightest emotion for any one. That gives, perhaps, a certain hardness. It is not natural. 'Une petite faiblesse donne tant de charme.'"

"In a wife, one might dispense with the 'petite faiblesse' for any one else," said Della Rocca, with a smile;

the blemish did not seem much of a fault in his eyes.

"That is a romantic notion," said the Duc, with a little touch of disdain. "In real truth a woman is easier to manage who has had—a past. She knows what to expect. It is flattering to be the first object of passion to a woman. But it is troublesome: she exacts so much!"

"If I were not that, I have seldom cared to be anything," said Della Rocca.

"That is an Italian amorous fancy. Romeo and Othello are the typical Italian lovers. I never can tell how a northerner like Shakespeare could draw either. You are often very unfaithful; but *while* you are faithful you are ardent, and you are absorbed in the woman. That is one of the reasons why an Italian succeeds in love as no other man does. 'L'art de brûler silencieusement le cœur d'une femme' is a supreme art with you. Compared with you, all other men are children. You have been the supreme masters of the great passion since the days of Ovid."

"Because it is much more the supreme pursuit of our lives than it is with other men. How can Love be of much power where it is inferior to fox-hunting, and a mere interlude when there is no other sport to be had, as it is with Englishmen."

"And with a Frenchman it is always inferior to himself!" confessed the French Duc, with a smile. "At least they say so. But every human being loves his vanity first. 'Only wounded my vanity?' poor Lord Strangford used to say. 'Pray what dearer and more integral part of myself could you wound?' He was very right. If we are not on good terms with ourselves we can never prevail with others."

"Yet a vain man seldom succeeds with women?"

"A man who lets them see that he is vain does not: that is another matter. Vanity—ah! there is Miladi, she has plenty of vanity; yet it is of a grandiose kind, and it would only take a little more time, and the first grey hair to turn it into dissatisfaction. All kinds of discontent are only superb vanities. Byron's, Musset's, Bolingbroke's——"

A horse nearly knocked the Duc down in the midst of his philosophies as he picked his way delicately amongst the standing and moving carriages to the place where the white greatcoats with the black velvet collars of the Lady Hilda's servants were visible.

The Lady Hilda's victoria stood in that open square where it is the pleasure of fashionable Floralia to stop its carriages in the course of the drive before dinner.

The piazza is the most unlovely part of the park: it has a gaunt red café and a desert of hard-beaten sand, and in the middle there are some few plants, and a vast quantity of iron bordering laid out in geometrical patterns, with more hard-beaten sand between them, this being the modern Floralian idea of a garden; to which fatal idea are sacrificed the noble ilex shades, the bird-filled cedar groves, the deep delicious dreamful avenues, the moss-grown ways, and the leaf-covered fountains, worthy to shelter Narcissus and to bathe Nausicaa, which their wiser forefathers knew were alike the blessing and the glory of this land of the sun.

Nevertheless—perhaps because it is the last place in the world where anybody would be supposed ever voluntarily to stop a carriage—here motley modern society delights to group its fusing nationalities; and the same peo-

ple who bored each other in the morning's calls, and will bore each other in the evening's receptions, bore each other sedulously in the open air, and would not omit the sacred ceremonial for anything—unless, indeed, it rained.

Perhaps after all Floralia reads aright the generation that visits it. The ilex shadows and the cedar-groves need Virgil and Horace, Tasso and Petrarca, Milton and Shelley.

The Lady Hilda, who never by any chance paused in the piazzone, had stopped a moment there to please Madame Mila, who, in the loveliest Incroyable bonnet, was seated beside her.

The men of their acquaintance flocked up to the victoria. Lady Hilda paid them scanty attention, and occupied herself buying flowers of the poor women who lifted their fragrant basket-loads to the carriage. Madame Mila chattered like the brightest of parrakeets, and was clamorous for news.

"Quid novi?" is the cry in Floralia from morning till night, as in Athens. The most popular people are those who, when the article is not to be had of original growth, can manufacture it. Political news nobody attends to in Floralia; financial news interests society a little more, because everybody has stocks or shares in something somewhere; but *the* news is Gossip,—dear delicious perennial ever-blessed gossip, that reports a beloved friend in difficulties, a rival *in extremis,* a neighbour no better than she should be, and some exalted personage or another caught hiding a king in his sleeve at cards, or kissing his wife's lady-of-the-bedchamber.

Gossip goes the round of the city in winter as the lemonade stands do in summer.

If you wish to be *choyé* and asked out every night, learn to manufacture it; it is very easy: take equal parts of flower of malice and essence of impudence, with several pepper-corns of improbability to spice it, some candied lemon-peel of moral reflections, and a few drops of the ammonia of indecency that will make it light of digestion, and the toothsome morsel will procure you welcome everywhere. If you can also chop up any real Paschal lamb of innocence in very fine pieces, so that it is minced and hashed and unrecognizable for ever, serve the mince with the vinegar of malignity, and the fresh mint of novelty, and you will be the very Carême of gossip henceforward. Run about society with your concoctions in and out of the best houses, as fast as you can go, and there will be no end to your popularity. You will be as refreshing to the thirst of the dwellers in them as are the lemonade-sellers to the throats of the populace.

Perhaps Fate still lurked and worked in the Latin land, and had hidden herself under the delicate marabouts of the chapeau Incroyable; at any rate, Madame Mila welcomed the Duc and his companion with eagerness, and engaged them both to dinner with her on the morrow in a way which there was no refusing.

Madame Mila was discontented with the news of the day. All her young men could only tell her of one person's ruin—poor Victor de Salaris', which she had always predicted and contributed to cause, and which was therefore certainly the more agreeable—and two scenes between married people whom she knew: one because the brute of a husband would not allow his wife to have her tallest footman in silk stockings; the other because the no less a brute of a husband would not

let *his* wife have—a friendship. Madame Mila scarcely knew which refusal to condemn as the most heartless and the most vulgar.

The Lady Hilda dined with her on the morrow; and the little Comtesse, with the fine instinct at discovering future sympathies of a woman "qui a vècu," took care that Della Rocca took her cousin in to dinner.

"I would give all I possess to see Hilda *attendrie,*" she said to herself: as what she possessed just then was chiefly an enormous quantity of unpaid bills, perhaps she would not have lost so very much. But the Lady Hilda was not *attendrie:* she thought he talked better than most men—at least, differently,—and he succeeded in interesting her, probably because he had been so indifferent in calling upon her. That was all. Besides, his manner was perfect; it was as *vieille cour* as M. de St. Louis's, and to the Italian noble alone is given the union of stateliest dignity with easiest grace.

Lady Hilda, who should have been born under Louis Quatorze, had often suffered much in her taste from an age when manner, except in the south, is only a tradition, smothered under cigar-ash, and buried in a gun-case.

As for him, he mused, while he talked to her, on the words of the Duc, who had known her all her life. Was it true that she had never felt even a passing "weakness"? Was it certain that she had always been as cold as she looked?

He wished that he could be sure.

After all, she was a woman of wonderful charm, though she did go about with Madame Mila, smoke cigarettes after dinner, and correct you as to the last *mot* made on the boulevards. He began to think that

this was only the mere cachet of the world she lived in; only the mere accident of contact and habit.

All women born under the Second Empire have it more or less; and, after all, she had but little of it; she was very serene, very contemptuous, very high-bred; and her brilliant languid hazel eyes looked so untroubled that it would have moved any man into a wish to trouble their still and luminous depths.

She seemed to him very objectless and somewhat cynical. It was a pity. Nature had made her perfect in face and form, and gifted her with intelligence, and Fashion had made her useless, tired, and vaguely cynical about everything, as everybody else was in her world; except that yet larger number who resembled Madame Mila—a worse type still, according to his view.

It was a pity that the coldness and corruption of the great world had entered thus deeply into her; so he thought, watching the droop of her long eyelashes, the curve of her beautiful mouth, the even coming and going of her breath under her shining necklace of opals and emeralds.

He began to believe that the Duc was right. There was no "past" in that calmest of indolent glances.

"You smoke, Madame?" he said, a little abruptly to her, after dinner.

She looked at her slender roll of paper.

"It is a habit—like all the rest of the things one does. I do not care about it."

"Why do it then? Are you not too proud to follow a habit, and imitate a folly?"

She smiled a little, and let the cigarette pale its ineffectual fires and die out.

"They have not known how to deal with her," he thought to himself; and he sat down and played *écarte,* and allowed her to win, though he was one of the best players in Europe.

Fate had certainly been under the Incroyable bonnet of Madame Mila. For during the evening she suddenly recalled his villa, and announced her intention of coming to see it. In her little busy brain there was a clever notion that if she only could get her cousin once drawn into what the Duc would call a "petite faiblesse," she herself would hear no more lectures about Maurice; and lectures are always tiresome, especially when the lecturer has lent you several thousands, that it would be the height of inconvenience ever to be reminded to repay.

A woman who has "petites faiblesses" is usually impatient with one who has none; the one who has none is a kind of standing insolence. Women corrupt more women than men do. Lovelace does not hate chastity in women; but Lady Bellaston does with all her might.

Pretty Madame Mila was too good-natured and also too shallow to hate anything; but if she could have seen her cousin "compromised" she would have derived an exquisite satisfaction and entertainment from the sight. She would also have felt that Lady Hilda would have become thereby more natural, and more comfortable company.

"Dear me, she might have done anything she had liked all these years," thought Madame Mila; "nobody would have known anything—and nothing would hurt her if it were known, whilst she has all that money."

For Madame Mila herself, perched on one of the very topmost rungs of the ladder of the world's great-

ness, and able therefore to take a bird's-eye view therefrom of everything, was very shrewd in her way, and knew that society never was known yet to quarrel with the owner of fifty thousand a-year.

So she carried her airy little person, laden this night with gold embroideries on dull Venetian red, until she looked like a little figure made in Lac, over to the *écarté* table when the *écarté* was finished, and arranged a morning at Palestrina for the day after tomorrow. He could only express his happines and honour, and his regrets that Palestrina was little more than an empty shell for their inspection.

The day after the morrow was clear and cloudless, balmy and delicious; such days as the Floralian climate casts here and there generously amidst the winter cold as a foretaste of its paradise of summer. The snow was on the more distant mountains of course, but only made the landscape more lovely, changing to the softest blush colour and rose under the brightness of the noonday sun. The fields were green with the springing cereals; the pine-woods were filling with violets; the water courses were brimming and boisterously joyous.

It was winter still; but the sort of Winter that one would expect in Fairyland or in the planet Venus.

Madame Mila, clad in the strictest *directoire* costume, with a wonderful hat on her head that carried feathers, grasses, oleander flowers, and a bird of Dutch Guiana, and was twisted up on one side in a miraculous manner, descended with her Maurice to the Lady Hilda's victoria, lent her for the day. To drive into the country at all was an act abominable and appalling to all her ideas.

In Paris, except on race days, she never went further

than the lake, and never showed her toilettes in the Assembly at Versailles, because of the endless drive necessary as a means to get there.

In country houses she carefully kept her own room till about five o'clock; and, when forced for her health to go to Vichy or St. Moritz, or any such place, she played cards in the mornings, and when she was obliged to go out, looked at the other invalids' dresses. Mountains were only unpleasant things to be tunnelled; forests were tolerable, because one could wear such pretty Louis Quinze hunting-habits and the curée by torchlight was nice; the sea again was made endurable by bathing costumes, and it was fun to go and tuck up your things and hunt for prawns or pearls in the rock-pools and shallows—it gave rise to many very pretty situations. But merely to drive into the country!—it was only fit occupation for a maniac. Though she had proposed it herself, the patient Maurice had a very *mauvais quart-d'heure* as they drove.

The Lady Hilda, who was too truly great an *élégante* ever to condescend in the open air to the eccentricities and *bizarreries* of Madame Mila—mountebankisms worthy a travelling show, she considered them to be—was clad in her black sables, which contrasted so well with the fairness of her skin, and drove out with the Princess Olga; Carlo Maremma and M. de St. Louis fronting them in the Schouvaloff barouche. She did not hate the cold, and shiver from the fresh sea-wind, and worry about the badness of the steep roads as Madame Mila did; on the contrary, she liked the drive, long though it was, and felt a vague interest in the first sight of Palestrina, its towers and belfries shining white on

the mountain side, with the little villages clustered under its broad dark ring of forest.

"What a pity that Paolo is so poor!" said Carlo Maremma, looking upward at it.

"He carries his poverty with infinite grace," said the Princess Olga.

"He is worthy of riches," said the Duc.

Lady Hilda said nothing.

Palestrina was twelve miles and more from the city, and stood on the high hills facing the southwest; it was half fortress, half palace; in early times its lords had ruled from its height all the country round; and later on, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, a great Cardinal of the Della Rocca had made it into as sumptuous a dwelling-place as Caprarola or Poggio a Cajano.

Subsequently the family had ranged itself against the ruling faction of the province, and had suffered from war and confiscation; still later, Palestrina had been plundered by the French troops of Napoleon; yet, despoiled and impoverished as it was, it was majestic still, and even beautiful; for, unlike most such places, it had kept its girdle of oak and ilex woods; and its gardens, though wild and neglected, were unshorn of their fair proportions; and the fountains fell into their marble basins, and splashed the maiden-hair ferns that hung over them as they had done in another age for the delight of the great Cardinal and his favourites.

Della Rocca received them in the southern loggia, a beautiful vaulted and frescoed open gallery, designed by Bramante, and warm in the noonday sun, as though January were June.

A king could not have had more grace of welcome and dignity of courtesy than this ruined gentleman—he had a very perfect manner, certainly, thought Lady Hilda once again. She was one of those women (they are many) upon whom manner makes more impression than mind or morals. Why should it not? It is the charm of life and the touchstone of breeding.

There was only one friend with him, a great minister, who had retired from the world and given himself up to the culture of roses and strawberries. There was a simple repast, from the produce of his own lands, ready in what had been once the banqueting hall. It was made graceful by the old Venetian glass, the old Urbino plates, the old Cellini salt-cellars; and by grapes, regina and salamana, saved from the autumn, and bouquets of Parma violets and Bengal roses, in old blue Savona vases. It was a frugal meal, but fit for the tale-tellers of the Decameron.

They rambled over the great building first, with its vast windows showing the wide landscape of mountain and plain, and far away the golden domes and airy spires of the city shining through a soft mist of olive trees. The glory of this house was gone, but it was beautiful still with the sweet clear sunlight streaming through its innumerable chambers, and touching the soft hues of frescoed walls that had grown faded with age, but had been painted by Spinello, by Francia, by the Great Frate, and by a host whose names were lost, of earnest workers, and men with whom art had been religion.

It was all dim and worn and grey with the passage of time; but it was harmonious, majestic, tranquil. It

was like the close of a great life withdrawn from the world into a cloistered solitude and content to be alone with its God.

"Do not wish for riches," said the Lady Hilda to him, as he said something to her of it. "If you had riches you would desecrate this; you would 'restore' it, you would 'embellish' it, you would ruin it."

He smiled a little sadly.

"As it is, I can only keep the rains from entering and the rats from destroying it. Poverty, Madame, is only poetical to those who do not suffer it. Look!" he added, with a laugh, "you will not find a single chair, I fear, that is not in tatters."

She glanced at the great old ebony chair she was resting in, with its rich frayed tapestry seat, and its carved armorial bearings.

"I have suffered much more from the staring, gilded, and satin abominations in a millionaire's drawing-room. You are ungrateful——"

"And you, Madame, judge of pains that have never touched, and cannot touch you. However, I can be but too glad that Palestrina pleases you in any way. It has the sunshine of heaven, though not of fortune."

"And I am sure you would not give it up for all the wealth of the Rothschilds."

"No."

"How lovely this place would look," Madame Mila was saying at the same moment, out of his hearing, to the Princess Olga, "if Owen Jones could renovate it and Huby furnish it. Fancy it with all the gilding re-gilded and the pictures restored, and Aubusson and Persian carpets everywhere, and all those horrid old tapestries,

that must be full of spiders, pulled down and burnt. What a heavenly place it would be—and what balls one might give in it! Why, it would hold ten thousand people!"

"Poor Paolo will never be able to do it," said the Princess Schouvaloff, "unless——"

She glanced at the Lady Hilda where she sat, at the further end of the chamber, whilst Della Rocca leaned against the embrasure of the window.

"I think she has a fancy for him," said Madame Mila. "But as for marrying, you know,—that, of course, is out of the question."

"I don't see why," said the Princess.

"Oh, out of the question," said Madame Mila, hastily. "But if she should take a liking to him, it would be great fun. She's been so awfully *exaltée* about all that sort of thing. Dear me, what a pity all those nasty, old, dull frescoes can't be scraped off and something nice and bright, like what they paint now, be put there; but I suppose it would take so much money. I should hang silk over them; all these clouds of pale angels would make me melancholy mad. There is no style I care a bit for but Louis Quinze. I am having new wall hangings for my *salon* done by the Ste. Marie Réparatrice girls; a lovely green satin—apple-green—embroidered with wreaths of roses and broom, after flower-groups by Fantin. Louis Quinze is so cheerful, and lets you have such lots of gilding, and the tables have such nice straight legs, and you always feel with it as if you were in a theatre and expecting the *Jeune Premier* to enter. Here one feels as if one were in a church."

"A monastery," suggested Princess Olga.

Thereon they went and had their luncheon, and Madame Mila studying the Capo da Monte dessert-service, appraised its value—for she was a shrewd little woman—and wondered, if Paola della Rocca were so poor as they said, why did he not send up all these old porcelains and lovely potteries to the Hôtel Drouot: Capo da Monte, she reflected, sells for more than its weight in gold, now that it is the rage of the fashion. She felt inclined to suggest this to him, only she was not quite sure how he might take it. Italians, she had heard, were so absurdly proud and susceptible.

After luncheon they went into the green old gardens; green with ilex and arbutus and laurel and cypress avenues, although it was midwinter; and the great minister discoursed on the charms of the country and the beauty of solitude in a way that should almost have awakened the envy of Horace in his grave; and the Duc de St. Louis disagreed with him in witty arguments that might have made the shades of Rochefoucauld and Rivarol jealous.

And they rambled and idled and talked and sauntered in those charming hours which an Italian villa alone can create; and then the Ave Maria chimed from the belfries of a convent up above on the hill, and the winds grew chill, and the carriages were called round to the steps of the southern terrace, and the old steward brought to each lady the parting gift of a great cluster of the sweet Parma violets.

"Well, it's been pleasanter than I thought for," said Madame Mila, rolling homeward. "But oh, this wretched, odious road! I shall catch my death of cold,

and I dare say we shall all be killed on these horrible hills in the dark!"

Lady Hilda was very silent as they drove downward, and left Palestrina alone to grow grey in the shades of the twilight.

CHAPTER VI

"I THINK Italians are like Russian tea; they spoil you for any other——" wrote Lady Hilda to her brother Clairvaux. It was not a very clear phrase, nor very grammatical; but she knew what she meant herself, which is more than all writers can say they do.

Russian tea, or rather tea imported through Russia, is so much softer and of so much sweeter and subtler a flavour, that once drinking it you will find all other tea after it seem flat or coarse. When she had written this sentiment, however, she tore up the sheet of note paper which contained it, and tossed it in the fire; after all, Clairvaux would not understand—he never understood anything, dear old fellow—and he would be very likely to say all sorts of foolish things while there was not the slightest reason for any one's supposing.

"Do come out here as soon as you can," she wrote instead. "Of course it will all depend on your racing engagements; but if you do go to Paris to see Charles Lafitte, as you say, pray come on here. Not that you will care for Floralia at all; you never do care for these art cities, and it is its art, and its past, and its people that make its irresistible charm. Floralia is so graceful and so beautiful and so full of noble memories, that one cannot but feel the motley society of our own present day as a sort of desecration to it; the cocottes and cocodettes, the wheel-skaters and poker-players, the smokers and the

baigneuses, the viveurs and the viveuses of our time suit it sadly ill; it wants the scholars of Academe, the story-tellers of Boccaccio; it wants Sordello and Stradella, Desdemonda and Giulietta.

"One feels oneself not one half good enough for the stones one treads upon; life here should be a perpetual Kyrie Eleison; instead of which it is only a chorus of Offenbach's. Not that society anywhere, now, ever does rise higher than that; only here it jars on one more than elsewhere, and seems as profane as if one 'played ball with Homer's skull.'

"Floralia is a golden Ostensoir filled with great men's bones, and we choke it up with cigar ashes and champagne dregs. It cannot be helped, I suppose. The destiny of the age seems to be to profane all that have preceded it. It creates nothing—it desecrates everything. Society does not escape from the general influence; its kings are all kings of Brentford.

"Mila—who is here and happy as a bird—thinks Jack Cade and the Offenbach chorus the perfection of delight at all times.

"For myself, I confess, neither entertain me; I fail to see the charm of a drawing-room democracy *décolleté* and *décousu;* and I never did appreciate ladies who pass their lives in balancing themselves awkwardly on the bar of Dumas's famous Triangle; but that may be a prejudice—Mila says that it is.

"By-the-by, that odious young Des Gommeux has followed her here—I make myself disagreeable to him. I cannot do more. Spiridion has never interfered, and 'on ne peut pas être plus royaliste que le roi.' But you will skip all this, or give it to your wife. I know I

never read letters myself, so why should I expect you to do so? I am so sorry to hear of Vieille Garde's sprain; it is too vexing for you, just as he was so high in the betting. I hope Sister to Simonides turns out worth all we gave for her. There will be racing here in April, but it would only make you laugh—which would be rude; or swear—which would be worse. So please come long before it."

She folded up her letter, wrote "Pray try and come soon" across the top of it, and directed the envelope to the Earl of Clairvaux, Broomsden, Northampton, and then was provoked to think that she did not want good, clumsy, honest Clairvaux to come at all—not in her heart of hearts, because Clairvaux was always asking questions, and going straight to the bottom of things in his own simple, sturdy fashion, and never understood anything that was in the very least complex.

And then again she was more irritated still with herself, for admitting even to her own thoughts that there was anything complex, or that she did not want to examine too closely—just yet. And then she sat and looked into the fire, and thought of Palestrina, with its sweet faint scent of Parma violets, and its dim noble frescoes, and its mountain solitudes, under the clear winter moon.

She sat dreaming about it a long time—for her, because she was not a person that dreamed at all usually. Her life was too brilliant, and too much occupied, and too artificial. She was thinking, with a great deal of money, without desecrating it by "restoration," but by bringing all the art knowledge in the world to its en-

richment, it would be possible to make it as great as it had been in the days of its cardinal. What a pastime it would be, what an interest, what an occupation almost for a lifetime to render that grand old palace once more the world's wonder it had been in the sixteenth century!

Then she rose suddenly, with an impatient sigh, and went into her bedroom, and found fault with her maids: they had put Valenciennes on her petticoats, and she hated Valenciennes—no other lace had been so cheapened by imitation; they had put out her marron velvet with the ostrich feathers for that day's wearing, when they should have laid out the silver-grey cloth with the Genoa buttons; they were giving her glacé gloves instead of peau de Suède; they had got out Pompadour boots, and she required Paysanne shoes; it was a fine dry day. In point of fact, everything was wrong, and they were idiots, and she told them so as strongly as a high-bred lady can demean herself to speak. Each costume was put all together—dress, bonnet, boots, gloves—everything; what business had they to go and mix them all up and make everything wrong?

Her maids were used to her displeasure; but she was very generous, and if they were ill or in sorrow she was kind, so that they bore it meekly, and contented themselves with complaining of her in all directions to their allies.

"If she would only have her petites affaires like other ladies she would be much easier to content," said her head maid, who had served the aristocracy ever since the earliest days of the Second Empire.

When there were no lovers, there were much fewer

douceurs and perquisites; however, they endured that deprivation because Miladi was so very rich, and so easily plundered.

Miladi, now, arrayed in the silver-grey cloth with the Genoa buttons and the marabout feather trimming, went out to her victoria, en route to the galleries, of which she never tired, and the visits which immeasurably bored her. She had been in the great world for ten years, and the great world is too small to divert one for very long, unless one be as Madame Mila.

Nevertheless, the Lady Hilda found that Floralia interested her more than she would have believed that anything would do.

After all, Floralia was charming by the present, not only by the past.

If it had its kings of Brentford, with its Offenbach choruses, so had every other place; if it had a potpourri of nationalities, it had some of the most agreeable persons of every nation; if trying to be very naughty it generally only became very dull—that was the doom of modern society everywhere.

There were charming houses in it, where there were real wit, real music, and real welcome. If people saw each other too often, strong friendships could come out of such frequency as well as animosities; and there was a great charm in the familiar, easy, pleasant intimacies which so naturally grew out of the artistic idling under these sombre and noble walls, and in the palaces where all the arts once reigned.

She had begun to take the fair city into her heart, as every one who has a heart must needs do, having once dwelt within the olive girdle of its pure pale hills, and

seen its green waters wash the banks erst peopled with the gorgeous splendours of the Renaissance.

She even began to like her daily life in it; the mornings dreamed away before some favourite Giorgione or Veronese, or spent in dim old shops full of the oddest mingling of rubbish and of treasure; the twilights spent in picture-like old chambers, where dames of high degree had made their winter-quarters, fragrant with flowers and quaint with old tapestries and porcelains; the evenings passed in a society which, too motley to be intimate, yet too personal to dare be witty, was gradually made more than endurable to her, by the sound of one voice for which she listened more often than she knew, by the sight of one face which grew more necessary to her than she was aware.

"If one could be only quite alone here it would be too charming," she thought, driving this morning, while the sun shone on the golden reaches of the river, and the softly-coloured marbles caught the light, and the picturesque old shops gleamed many-hued as harlequin under the beetling brows of projecting roofs, and the carved stone of dark archways.

But if she had looked close into her own heart she would have seen that the solitude of her ideal would have been one like the French poet's—solitude *à deux*.

She did not go, after all, to her visits; she went instead, in and out of the studios whose artists adored her, though she was terribly hard to please, and had much more acquaintance with art than is desirable in a purchaser.

In one of the studios she chanced to meet the master of Palestrina; and he went with her to another atelier, and another and another.

She had her Paysanne shoes on, and her gold-headed cane, and let her victoria stand still while she walked from one to another of those sculptors' and painters' dens, which lie so close together, like beavers' work in the old grey quarters of the city.

Up and down the dark staircases, and in and out the gloomy vaulted passages, her silver-grey cloth with the marabout ruches gleamed and glistened, and to many of the artists proved as beneficent as a silvery cloud to the thirsty fields in summer.

She was surprised to find how much she liked it. There was not much genius, and there was a great deal of bad drawing, and worse modelling, and she had educated herself in the very strictest and coldest canons of art, and really cared for nothing later than Luca Signorelli, and abhorred Canova and everything that has come after him.

But there were some little figures in marble of young children that she could conscientiously buy, and the little Meissonier and Fortuny-like pictures were clever, if they were mere trickwork and told no story; and the modern oak carvings were really good; and on the whole she enjoyed her morning unusually; and her companion looked pleased, because she found things to praise.

As she walked, with Della Rocca beside her, in and out the dusky passageways, with the obnoxious Valenciennes under her skirts sweeping the stones, and her silvery marabouts glancing like hoarfrost in the shadows of the looming walls, the Lady Hilda felt very happy and on good terms with herself and the world. No doubt, she thought, it was the fresh west wind blowing

up the river from the sea which had done her so much good.

The golden Ostensoir, to which she had likened Floralia, no longer seemed filled with cigar-ash and absinthe dregs; but full of the fragrant rose-leaves of an imperishable Past, and the shining sands of a sweet unspent Time.

She made a poor sculptor happy for a year; she freed a young and promising painter from a heavy debt; she was often impatient with their productions, but she was most patient with their troubles.

She was only a woman of the world, touched for a day into warmer sympathies, but the blessings she drew down on her sank somehow into her heart, and made her half ashamed, half glad.

What was the use of writing fine contemptuous things of society unless one tried to drop oneself some little holy relic into the golden Ostensoir? She went home contented, and was so gentle with her maids that they thought she must be going to be unwell.

Her friend the Princess Olga came to chat with her, and they had their tea cozily in her dressing-room; and at eight o'clock she went to dine with Mrs. Washington, an American Parisienne or Parisian American, known wherever the world of fashion extended, and was taken in to dinner by the Duca della Rocca.

After dinner there was a new tenor, who was less of a delusion than most new tenors are; and there was a great deal of very aesthetic and abstruse talk about music; she said little herself, but sat and listened to Della Rocca, who spoke often and eloquently, with infinite grace and accurate culture. To a woman who has cared for no

one all her life, there is the strangest and sweetest pleasure in finding at last one voice whose mere sound is melody to her.

On the whole she went to bed with that dreamful content which had come on her in the day—no doubt with the fresh sea wind. She knew that she had looked at her best in a dress of pale dead gold, with old black Spanish lace; and she had only one regret—that in too soft a mood she had allowed an English person, a Lady Featherleigh, of whom she did not approve, to be presented to her.

She was habitually the one desire and the one despair of all her countrywomen.

Except so far as her physical courage, her skill in riding, and her beautiful complexion, which no cold could redden, and no heat could change, might be counted as national characteristics, the Lady Hilda was a very un-English Englishwoman in everything.

Indeed your true *élégante* is raised high above all such small things as nationalities; she floats serenely in an atmosphere far too elevated to be coloured by country; a neutral ground on which the leaders of every civilized land meet far away from all ordinary mortality.

In Floralia she found a few such choice spirits accustomed to breathe the same ether as herself, and with those she lived, carefully avoiding the Penal Settlement as she continued to call the cosmopolitan society which was outside the zone of her own supreme fashion.

She saw it, indeed, in ballrooms and morning receptions; it sighed humbly after her, pined for her notice, and would have been happy if she would but even have recompensed it by an insolence, but she merely ignored its

existence, and always looked over its head innocently and cruelly with that divine serenity of indifference and disdain with which Nature had so liberally endowed her.

"Why should I know them? They wouldn't please me," she would say to those who ventured to remonstrate, and the answer was unanswerable.

"I can't think how you manage, Hilda, to keep so clear of people," said Madame Mila, enviously. "Now, *I* get inundated with hosts of the horridest——"

"Because you cheapen yourself," said Lady Hilda, very coolly.

"I never could keep people off me," pursued the Comtesse. "When Spiridion had the Embassy in London, it was just the same; I was inundated! It's good nature, I suppose. Certainly, you haven't got too much of *that*."

Lady Hilda smiled; she thought of those six or eight thousands which had gone for Madame Mila's losses at play.

"Good nature is a very indifferent sort of quality," she answered. "It is compounded of weakness, laziness, and vulgarity. Generally speaking, it is only a desire for popularity, and there is nothing more vulgar than *that*."

"I don't see that it is vulgar at all," said Madame Mila, with some sharpness. "I like to think I am popular; to see a mob look after me; to have the shop-boys rush out to get a glimpse of me; to hear the crowd on a race-day call out 'Ain't she a rare un! my eye, ain't she fit!' just as if I were one of the mares. I often give a crossing-sweeper a shilling in London, just to make him 'bless my pretty eyes.' Why, even when I go to that beastly place of Spiridion's in Russia, I make the hideous serfs in love with me; it puts one on good terms with

oneself. I often think when the people in the streets don't turn after me as I go—then I *shall* know that I'm old!"

Lady Hilda's eyebrows expressed unutterable contempt; these were sentiments to her entirely incomprehensible.

"How very agreeable—to make the streets the barometer of one's looks—'fair or foul.' So you live in apprehension of a railway porter's indifference, and only approve of yourself if a racing tout smiles! My dear Mila, I never did believe you would have gone lower in the scale of human adorers than your Gommeux and Poisseux."

"At all events I am not so vain as you are, Hilda," retorted the Comtesse. "*You* approve of yourself eternally, whether all the world hates you or not. I remember Charlie Barrington saying of you once—'I wonder why that woman keeps straight—why should she? She don't care a hang what anybody says of her.'"

"How discerning of Lord Barrington! If people only 'keep straight' for the sake of what other people say of them, I think they may just as well 'go off the rails' in any manner they like. Certainly, what I chose to do, I should do, without reference to the approbation of the mob—either of the streets or of the drawing-rooms."

"Exactly what Barrington said," returned Madame Mila; "but then why do you—I mean, why don't you—amuse yourself?"

The Lady Hilda laughed.

"My dear! the Gommeux and the Poisseux would not amuse me. I am not so happily constituted as you are."

Madame Mila coloured.

"That's all very fine talk, but you know it isn't natural——"

"To live decently?—no, I suppose it is not nowadays. Perhaps it never was. But, my dear Mila, you needn't be too disquieted about me. If it make you any more comfortable as to my sanity, I can assure you it is not virtue; no one knows such a word; it is only indifference."

"You are very queer, Hilda," said Madame Mila, impatiently; "all I know is, I should like to see you in love, and see what you'd say *then*."

The Lady Hilda, who was never more moved by her feather-headed cousin's words than a rock by a butterfly, felt a sudden warmth on her face—perhaps of anger.

"In love!" she echoed, with less languor and more of impetuosity than she had ever displayed, "are you ever in love, any of you, ever? You have senses and vanity and an inordinate fear of not being in the fashion—and so you take your lovers as you drink your stimulants and wear your wigs and tie your skirts back—because everybody else does it, and not to do it is to be odd, or prudish, or something you would hate to be called. Love! it is an unknown thing to you all. You have a sort of miserable hectic passion, perhaps, that is a drug you take as you take chlorodyne—just to excite you and make your jaded nerves a little alive again, and yet you are such cowards that you have not even the courage of passion, but label your drug Friendship, and beg Society to observe that you only keep it for family uses like arnica or like glycerine. You want notoriety; you want to indulge your fancies, and yet keep your place in the world. You

like to drag a young man about by a chain, as if he were the dancing monkey that you depended upon for subsistence. You like other women to see that you are not too *passée* to be every whit as improper as if you were twenty. You like to advertise your successes as it were with drum and trumpet, because if you did not, people might begin to doubt that you had any. You like all that, and you like to feel there is nothing you do not know and no length you have not gone, and so you ring all the changes on all the varieties of intrigue and sensuality, and go over the gamut of sickly sentiment and nauseous license as an orchestra tunes its strings up every night! That is what all you people call love; I am content enough to have no knowledge of it——"

"Good gracious, Hilda!" said Madame Mila, with wide-open eyes of absolute amazement; "you talk as if you were one of the angry husbands in a comedy of Feuillet or Dumas. I don't think you know anything about it at all; how should you? You only admire yourself, and like art and all that kind of thing, and are as cold as ice to everybody. 'À la place du cœur, vous n'avez qu'un caillou'; I've read that somewhere."

"'Elle n'a qu'un écusson,'" corrected Lady Hilda, her serenity returning. "If Hugo had known much about women he would have said—'qu'un chiffon'; but perhaps a dissyllable wouldn't have scanned——"

"You never will convince me," continued Madame de Caviare, "that you would not be a happier woman if you had what you call senses and the rest of it. One can't live without sensations and emotions of some sort. You never feel any except before a bit of Kronenthal china or a triptych of some old fogey of a painter. You

do care awfully about your horses to be sure, but then, as you don't bet on anything, I don't see what excitement you can get out of them. You won't play—which is the best thing to take to of all, because it will last; the older they grow, the wilder women get about it; look at Spiridion's aunt Seraphine—over eighty—as keen as a ferret over her winnings, and as fierce as a tom-cat over her losses. Now, that is a thing that can't hurt any one, let you say what you like; everybody plays, why won't you? If you lost half your income in one night, it wouldn't ruin you, and you have no idea how delicious it is to get dizzy over the cards; you know one bets even at poker to any amount——"

"Thanks; it won't tempt me," answered Lady Hilda. "I have played at Baden, to see if it would amuse me, and it didn't amuse me in the least; no more than M. des Gommeux does! My dearest Mila, I am sure that you people who do excite yourselves over baccarat and poker, and can feel really flattered at having a Maurice always in attendance, and can divert yourselves with oyster suppers and masked balls and cotillon riots, are the happy women of this world, that I quite grant you: oysters and Maurices and cotillon and poker are so very easy to be got——"

"And men like women who like them!"

"That I grant too; poker and cotillons don't exact any very fine manners, and men nowadays always like to be, metaphorically, in their smoking-coats. Only you see we are not always all constituted of the same fortunate disposition; poker and cotillons only bore me. You should think it my misfortune, not my fault. I am sure it must be charming to drink a quantity of champagne,

and whirl round like a South Sea islander, and play pranks that pass in a palace though the police would interfere in a dancing garden, and be found by the sun drinking soup at a supper-table: I am sure it must be quite delightful. Only you see it doesn't amuse me;—no more than scrambling amongst a pack of cards flung on their faces, which you say is delightful too; or keeping a Maurice in your pocket, like your cigar-case and your handkerchief, which you say is most delightful of all. But good-bye, my dear, we shall quarrel if we talk much longer like this; and we must not quarrel till tomorrow morning, because your Dissimulée dress will look nothing without my Austraisienne one. What time shall I call for you? Make it as late as you can. I shall only just show myself."

"Three o'clock, then—that is quite early enough," muttered Madame Mila, somewhat sulkily; but she had teased and prayed her cousin into accompanying her in Louis Seize costumes, most carefully compiled by Worth from engravings and pictures of the period, to the Trasimene costume ball, and would not fall out with her just on the eve of it, because she knew their entrance would be *the* effect of the night, accompanied as they would be by the Duc de St. Louis and M. des Gommeux as Grand Écuyer de France, and as Petit Maître en chenille, of the same century.

"Say half-past," answered the Lady Hilda, as she closed the door and went into her own rooms on the opposite side of the staircase.

"I really begin to think she is jealous of Maurice and in love with him!" thought Madame Mila, in whose eyes Maurice was irresistible, though with the peculiar

optimism of ladies in her position she was perfectly certain that he was adamant also to all save herself. And the idea of her fastidious cousin's hopeless passion so tickled her fancy that she laughed herself into a good humour as her maids disrobed her; and she curled herself up in her bed to get a good night's sleep out before donning the Dissimulée costume for the Trasimene ball, so that she should go at half-past three "as fresh as paint," in the most literal sense of the word, to all the joyous rioting of the cotillon which Maurice was to lead.

"You shine upon us late, Madame," said Della Rocca, advancing to meet the Lady Hilda, when they reached, at four o'clock in the morning, the vast and lofty rooms glittering with fancy dresses.

"I only came at all to please Mila, and she only comes for the cotillon," she answered him, and she thought how well he looked as she glanced at him. He wore a white Louis Treize Mousquetaire dress, and he had the collar of the Golden Fleece about his throat, for, amongst his many useless titles, and barren dignities, he was, like many an Italian noble, also a grandee of Spain.

"You do not dance, Madame?" he asked.

"Very seldom," she answered, as she accepted his arm to move through the rooms. "When mediaeval dresses came in, dancing should have been banished. Who could dance well in a long close clinging robe tightly tied back, and heavy with gold thread and bullion fringes; they should revive the minuet; we might go through that without being ridiculous. But if they *will* have the cotillon instead, they should dress like the girls in Offenbach's pieces, as many of them happen to be tonight. I do not object to a mixture of epochs in

furniture, but romping in a renaissance skirt!—that is really almost blasphemy enough to raise the ghost of Titian!"

"I am afraid Madama Pampinet and the Fiammina must have romped sometimes," said Della Rocca with a smile. "But then you will say the Decadence had already cast its shadow before it."

"Yes; but there never was an age so vulgar as our own," said the Lady Hilda. "That I am positive of;—look, even peasants are vulgar now: they wear tall hats and tawdry bonnets on Sundays; and, as for our society, it is 'rowdy': there is no other word for it, if you understand what that means."

"Canaille?"

"Yes, Canaille. M. de St. Louis says, the 'femme comme il faut' of his youth is extinct as the dodo: language is slang, society is a mob, dress is display, amusement is riot, people are let into society who have no other claim to be there but money and impudence, and are as ignorant as our maids and our grooms, and more so. It is all as bad as it can be, and I suppose it will only go on getting worse. You Italians are the only people with whom manner is not a lost art."

"You do us much honour. Perhaps we too shall be infected before long. We are sending our lads to public schools in your country; they will probably come back unable to bow, ashamed of natural grace, and ambitious to emulate the groom model in everything. This is thought an advanced education.

Lady Hilda laughed.

"The rich Egyptians go to English universities, and take back to the Nile a passion for rat-hunting and

brandy, and the most hideous hats and coats in the universe; and then think they have improved on the age of the Pharaohs. I hope Italy will never be infected, but I am afraid; you have gasworks, tramways, and mixed marriages, and your populace has almost entirely abandoned costume."

"And in the cities we have lost the instinct of good taste in the most fatal manner. Perhaps it has died out with the old costumes. Who knows? Dress is after all the thermometer of taste. Modern male attire is of all others the most frightful, the most grotesque, the most gloomy, and, to our climate, the most unsuitable."

"Yes. Tall hats and tail coats appear to me to be like the locusts, wherever they spread they bear barrenness in their train. But the temper of your people will always procure to you some natural grace, some natural elegance."

"Let us hope so; but in all public works our taste already is gone. One may say, without vanity, that in full sense of beauty and of proportion, Italy surpassed of old all the world: how is it, I often ask myself, that we have lost so much of this? Here in Floralia, if we require gas-works we erect their chimneys on the very bank of our river, ruining one of the loveliest views in the world, and one that has been a tradition of beauty for ages. If it be deemed necessary to break down and widen our picturesque old bridges, we render them hideous as any railway road, by hedging them with frightful monotonous parapets of cast-iron, the heaviest, most soulless, most hateful thing that is manufactured. Do we make a fine hill-drive, costing us enormously, when we

have no money to pay for it, we make one, indeed, as fine as any in Europe; and having made it, then we ruin it by planting at every step cafés, and guinguettes, and guard houses, and every artificial abomination and vulgarity in stucco and brick-work that can render its noble scenery ridiculous. Do we deem it advisable, for sanitary or other purposes, to turn the people out of the ancient market where they keep their stalls under the old palace walls happily enough, summer and winter, like so many Dutch pictures, we build a cage of iron or glass like an enormous cucumber frame, inexpressibly hideous, and equally incommodious, and only adapted to grill the people in June and turn them to ice in January. What is the reason? We have liberal givers such as your countryman Sloane, such as my countryman Galliera, yet what single modern thing worth producing can we show? We have destroyed much that will be as irreparable a loss to future generations as the art destroyed in the great siege is to us. But we have produced nothing save deformity. Perhaps, indeed, we might not have any second Michael Angelo to answer if we called on him, but it is certain that we must have architects capable of devising something in carven stone to edge a bridge; we must have artists who, were they consulted, would say, 'Do not insult a sublime panorama of the most poetic and celebrated valley in the world by putting into the foreground a square guards' box, a stucco drinking-house, and the gilded lamps of a dancing-garden.' We must have men capable of so much as that—yet they are either never employed or never listened to; the truth I fear is that a public work nowadays with us is like a plant being carried to be planted in a city square, of

which every one who passes it by plucks off a leaf: by the time it reaches its destination the plant is leafless. The public work is the plant, and the money to be got from it is the foliage; provided each one plucks as much foliage as he can, no one cares in what state the plant reaches the piazza."

Lady Hilda looked at him as he spoke with an eloquence and earnestness which absorbed him for the moment, so that he forgot that he was talking to a woman, and a woman whose whole life was one of trifling, of languor, and of extravagance.

"All that is very true," she said, with some hesitation; "but why then do you hold yourself aloof—why do you do nothing to change this state of public things? You see the evil, but you prescribe no remedy."

"The only remedy will be Time," he answered her. "Corruption has eaten too deeply into the heart of this nation to be easily eradicated. The knife of war has not cut it out; we can only hope for what the medicines of education and of open discussion may do; the greatest danger lies in the inertia of the people; they are angry often, but they do not move——"

"Neither do you move, though you are angry."

He smiled a little sadly.

"If I were a rich man I would do so. Poor as I am I could not embrace public life without seeming to seek my own private ends from office. A man without wealth has no influence, and his motives will always be suspected—at least here."

"But one should be above suspicion——"

"Were one certain to do good—yes."

"But why should you despair? You have a country

of boundless resources, a people affectionate, impressionable, infinitely engaging, and much more intelligent naturally than any other populace, a soil that scarce needs touching to yield the richest abundance, and in nearly every small town or obscure city some legacy of art or architecture, such as no other land can show——"

"Despair! God forbid that I should despair. I think there is infinite hope, but I cannot disguise from myself that there are infinite dangers also. An uneducated peasantry has had its religion torn away from it, and has no other moral landmark to cling to; old ways and old venerations are kicked aside and nothing substituted; public business means almost universally public pillage; the new text placed before the regenerated nation is, 'Make money, honestly if you can—but make money!' haste, avarice, accumulation, cunning, neglect of all loveliness, desecration of all ancientness—these, the modern curses which accompany 'progress'—are set before a scarcely awakened people as the proper objects and idols of their efforts. We, who are chiefly to be moved by our affections and our imaginations, are only bidden to be henceforth inspired by a joyless prosperity and a loveless materialism. We, the heirs of the godhead of the Arts, are only counselled to emulate the mechanical inventions and the unscrupulous commerce of the American genius, and are ordered to learn to blush with shame because our ancient cities, sacred with the ashes of heroes, are not spurious brand-new lath and plaster human ant-hills of the growth of yesterday!—Forgive me, Madame," he said, interrupting himself, with a little laugh, "I forget that I am tedious to you. With the taxes at fifty-two per cent., a poor landowner like

myself may incline to think that all is not as well as it should be."

"You interest me," said the Lady Hilda, and her eyes dwelt on him with a grave, musing regard that they had given to no man, "and on your own lands, with your own people—how is it there?"

His face brightened.

"My people love me," he said, softly. "As for the lands—when one is poor, one cannot do much; but every one is content on them—that is something."

"Is it not everything?" said the Lady Hilda, with a little sigh; for she herself, who could gratify her every wish, had never yet quite known what content could mean. "Let us go and look at the ballroom; Mila will be coming to know if we have heard of MacMahon's death, that we talk so seriously."

She walked, on his arm, to the scene of tumult, where, being hemmed in by lookers-on till the pressure left them scarcely any space to perform upon, the dancers were going through a quadrille with exceeding vivacity, and with strong reminiscences in it of some steps of the can-can; Madame Mila and Lady Featherleigh particularly distinguishing themselves by their imitations of the Chimpanzee dance, as performed in the last winter's operetta of Ching-aring-aring-ching.

They were of course being watched and applauded very loudly by the ring of spectators as if they were really the actors in the Ching-aring-aring-ching, which afforded them the liveliest pleasure possible, great ladies being never so happy nowadays as when they are quite sure that they might really be taken for comedians or courtesans.

It was hard upon Madame Mila that just as she had jumped so high that La Petite Boulotte herself could scarcely have jumped higher, the lookers-on turned their heads to see the Lady Hilda in the doorway on the arm of her white Mousquetaire. Lady Hilda was beyond all dispute the most beautiful woman of the rooms, she threw them all into the shade as a rose diamond throws stars of strass; and many of the men were so dazzled by her appearance there, that they actually lost the sight of Madame Mila's rose-coloured stockings twinkling in the air.

"Paolo fait bonne fortune," they said to one another, and began to make wagers that she would marry him, or, on the other hand, that she was only playing with him: opinion varied, and bets ran high.

Society bets on everything—peace and love, and honour and happiness, are only "staying" horses or "non-stayers," on whose running the money is piled. It is fortunate indeed and rare when the betting is "honest," and if the drinking waters of peace be not poisoned on purpose, or the smooth turf of a favourite's career be not sprinkled with glass, by those who have laid the odds heavily against it. So that they land their bets, what do they care whether or no the subject of their speculations be lamed for life and destined to drag out its weary days between the cab-shafts till the end comes in the knacker's yard?

As for the Lady Hilda, she was so used to be the observed of all observers wherever she went, that she never heeded who looked at her, and never troubled herself what anybody might say.

She walked about with Della Rocca, talked with him,

and let him sit by her in little sheltered camellia-filled velvet-hung nooks, because it pleased her, and because he looked like an old Velasquez picture in that white Louis Treize dress. Of what anybody might think she was absolutely indifferent; she was not mistress of herself and of fifty thousand a year to care for the tittle-tattle of a small winter city.

It was very pleasant to be mistress of herself—to do absolutely as she chose—to have no earthly creature to consult—to go to bed in Paris and wake up in St. Petersburg if the fancy took her—to buy big diamonds till she could outblaze Lady Dudley—to buy thoroughbred horses and old pictures and costly porcelains and all sorts of *bibelots,* ancient and curious, that might please her taste—to obey every caprice of the moment and to have no one to be responsible to for its indulgence—to write a cheque for a large amount if she saw any great distress that was painful to look upon—to adorn her various houses with all that elegance of whim and culture of mind could gather together from the treasures of centuries—to do just as she pleased, in a word, without any one else to ask, or any necessity to ponder whether the expense were wise. It was very agreeable to be mistress of herself, and yet——

There is a capitalist in Europe who is very unhappy because all his wealth cannot purchase the world-famous Key of the Strozzi Princes.

Lady Hilda was never unhappy, but she was not quite content.

Out of the very abundance of her life she was weary, and there was a certain coldness in it all; it was too like one of her own diamonds.

She sighed a little tonight when her white Mousquetaire had led her to her carriage, and she was rolling across the bridge homeward, whilst Madame Mila's gossamer skirts were still twirling, and her rosy stockings still twinkling in all the intricacies and diversions with which the Vicomte Maurice would keep the cotillon going until nine o'clock in the morning.

In the darkness of her carriage, as it went over the stones through the winding ill-lit streets, she saw soft amorous eyes looking at her under their dreamy lids; she could not forget their look; she was haunted by it—it had said so much.

The tale it had told was one she had heard indeed twenty times a year for ten long years, and it had never moved her; it had bored her—nothing more.

But now—a sudden warmth, a strange emotion, thrilled in her, driving through the dark with the pressure of his hand still seeming to linger upon hers.

It was such an old, old tale that his eyes had told, and yet for once it had touched her somehow and made her heart quicken, her colour rise.

"It is too ridiculous!" she said to herself. "I am dreaming. Fancy *my* caring!"

And she was angry with herself, and when she reached her own rooms looked a moment at her full reflection in the long mirrors, diamonds and all, before she rang for her maid to come to her.

It was a brilliant and beautiful figure that she saw there in the gorgeous colours copied from a picture by Watteau le Jeune, and with the great stones shining above her head and on her breast like so many little dazzling suns.

She had loved herself very dearly all her life, lived for herself, and in a refined and lofty way had been as absolutely self-engrossed and amorous of her own pleasure and her own vanities as the greediest and cruellest of ordinary egótists.

"Am I a fool?" she said, angrily, to her own image. "It is too absurd! Why should he move me more than any one of all the others?"

And yet suddenly all the life which had so well satisfied her seemed empty—seemed cold and hard as one of her many diamonds.

She rang with haste and impatience for her maid; and all they did, from the hot soup they brought to the way they untwisted her hair, was wrong; and when she lay down in her bed she could not sleep, and when the bright forenoon came full of the sound of pealing bells and gay street songs and hurrying feet, she fell into feverish dreams, and, waking later, did not know what ailed her.

From that time Della Rocca ceased to avoid the Hôtel Murat; he was received there oftener than on her "day"; he went about with her on various pilgrimages to quaint old out-of-the-way nooks of forgotten art which he could tell her of, knowing every nook and corner of his native city; she almost always invited him when she had other people to dine with her; her cousin did the same, and he was usually included in all those manifold schemes for diversions which women like Madame Mila are always setting on foot, thinking with Diderot's vagabond that it is something at any rate to have got rid of Time.

Sometimes he availed himself of these opportunities of Fortune, sometimes he did not. His conduct had a variableness about it which did more than anything else

would have done to arrest the attention of a woman sated with homage as the Lady Hilda had been all her days. She missed him when he was absent; she was influenced by him when he was present. Beneath the softness of his manner there was a certain seriousness which had its weight with her. He made her feel ashamed of many things.

Something in his way of life also attracted her. There are a freedom and simplicity in all the habits of an Italian noble that are in strong contrast with the formal conventionalism of the ways of other men; there is a feudal affectionateness of relation between him and his dependants which is not like anything else; when he knows anything of agriculture, and interests himself personally in his people, the result is an existence which makes the life of the Paris flâneurs and the London idlers look very poor indeed.

Palestrina often saw its lord drive thither by six in the morning, walk over his fields, hear grievances and redress them, mark out new vine-walks with his bailiff, watch his white oxen turn the sods of the steep slopes, and plan trench-cuttings to arrest the winter-swollen brooks, long before the men of his degree in Paris or in London opened their heavy eyes to call for their morning taste of brandy, and awoke to the recollection of their night's gaming losses, or their wagers on coming races.

The finest of fine gentlemen, the grandest of grand seigneurs, in court or drawing-room or diplomatic circle, Paolo della Rocca, amongst his own grey olive orchards and the fragrance of his great wooden storehouses, was as simple as Cincinnatus, laughed like a boy with his old steward, caressed like a woman the broad heads o

his beasts at the plough, and sat under a great mulberry to break his bread at noonday, hearkening to the talk of his peasants as though he were one of them.

The old Etrurian gentleness and love of the rural life are still alive in this land; may they never perish, for they are to the nation, as the timely rains to the vine, as the sweet strong sun to the harvest.

This simplicity, this naturalness, which in the Italian will often underlie the highest polish of culture and of ceremony, had a curious fascination for a woman in whose own life there had been no place for simplicity and no thought for nature.

She had been in the bonds of the world always, as a child in its swaddling bands; none the less so because she had been one of its leaders in those matters of supreme fashion wherein she had reigned as a goddess. Her life had been altogether artificial; she had always been a great garden lily in a hothouse, she had never known what it was to be blown by a fresh breeze on a sun-swept moorland like a heather flower. The hothouse shelters from all chills and is full of perfume, but you can see no horizon from it; that alone is the joy of the moorland. Now and then, garden lily in a stove-heated palace though she was, some vague want, some dim unfulfilled wish, had stirred in her; she began to think now that it had been for that unknown horizon.

"Men live too much in herds, in crowded rooms, amongst stoves and gas jets," he said to her once. "There are only two atmospheres that do one morally any good —the open air and the air of the cloister."

"You mean that there are only two things that are good—activity and meditation?"

"I think so. The fault of society is that it substitutes for those, stimulants and stagnation."

He made her think—he influenced her more than she knew. Under the caressing subserviency to her as of a courtier, she felt the power of a man who discerned life more clearly and more wisely than herself.

The chief evil of society lies in the enormous importance which it gives to trifles. She began to feel that with all her splendour she had been only occupied with trifles. Nature had been a sealed book to her, and she began to doubt that she had even understood Art.

"If you can be pleased with this," says a great art-critic, "this" being a little fresco of St. Anne, "you can see Floralia. But if not,—by all means amuse yourself there, if you find it amusing, as long as you like; you can never see it."

The test may be a little exaggerated, but the general meaning of his words is correct.

Cosmopolitan and Anglo-American Floralia, for the main part, do not see the city they come to winter in; see nothing of its glories, of its sanctities, of its almost divinities; see only their own friends, their own faces, their own fans, flirtations, and fallals, reflected as in mirrors all around them, and filling up their horizon.

"A Dutchman can be just as solemnly and entirely contemplative of a lemon-pip and a cheese-paring as an Italian of the Virgin in glory."

Cosmopolitan and Anglo-American Floralia is in love with its lemon-pips, and has no eyes for the Glory. When it has an eye, indeed, it is almost worse, because it is bent on buying the Glory for its drawing-room staircase, or worse yet, on selling it again at a profit.

The Lady Hilda, who did not love lemon-pips, but who yet had never seen the Glory with that simplicity, as of a child's worship, which alone constitutes the true sight, began to unlearn many of her theories, and to learn very much in emotion and vision, as she carried her delicate disdainful head into the little dusky chapels and the quiet prayer-worn chauntries of Floralia.

Her love of Art had after all been a cold, she began to think a poor, passion. She had studied the philosophy of Art, had been learned in the contemplative and the dramatic schools, had known the signs manual of this epoch and the other, had discoursed learnedly of Lombard and Byzantine, of objective and subjective, of archaic and naturalistic; but all the while it had been not very much more than a scholarly jargon, a graceful pedantry, which had served to make her doubly scornful of those more ignorant. Art is a fashion in some circles, as religion is in some, and license is in others; and Art had been scarcely deeper than a fashion with her, or cared for more deeply than as a superior kind of furniture.

But here, in this, the sweetest, noblest, most hallowed city of the world, which has been so full of genius in other times, that the fragrance thereof remains, as it were, upon the very stones, like that Persian attar, to make one ounce of which a hundred thousand roses die, here something much deeper yet much simpler came upon her.

Her theories melted away into pure reverence, her philosophies faded into tenderness, new revelations of human life came to her before those spiritual imaginings of men to whom the blue sky had seemed full of angels,

and the watches of the night had been stirred by the voice of God: before those old panels and old frescoes, often so simple, often so pathetic, always so sincere in faith and in work, she grew herself simpler and of more humility, and learned that art is a religion for whose right understanding one must needs become "even as a little child."

She had been in great art cities before; in the home of Tintoretto and the Veronese, in the asylum of the Madonna de San Sisto, in the stone wilderness of Ludwig where the Faun sleeps in exile, in mighty Rome itself; but she had not felt as she felt now. She had been full of appreciation of their art, but they had left her as they had found her, cold, vain, self-engrossed, entirely shut in a Holy of Holies of culture and of criticism; she had covered her Cavalcaselle with pencil notes, and had glanced from a predella or a pietà to the pages of her Ruskin with a serene smile of doubt.

But here and now Art ceased to be science, and became emotion in her. Why was it?—she did not care to ask herself.

Only all her old philosophies seemed falling about her like shed leaves, and her old self seemed to her but a purposeless frivolous chilly creature. The real reason she would not face, and indeed as yet was not conscious of; the reason that love had entered into her, and that love, if it be worth the name, has always two handmaidens: swift sympathy, and sad humility, keeping step together.

CHAPTER VII

FOREIGN Floralia, i. e., that portion of Floralia which is not indigenous to the soil, but has only own south with the swallows, is remarkable for a really od-like consciousness—it knows everything about every-ody, and all things, past, present, and to come, that ever id, could, would, should, cannot, will not, or never shall appen; and is aware of all things that have ever taken lace, and of a great many things that never have done so. t is much better informed about you than you are ourself; knows your morals better than your confessor, our constitution better than your doctor, your income etter than your banker, and the day you were born n, better than your mother. It is omniscient and omni-resent, microscopic and telescopic; it is a court-edition f Scotland Yard, and a pocket-edition of the Cabinet Noir; it speeds as many interrogations as a telegraph-ire, and has as many mysteries as the agony column f a newspaper—only it always answers its own ques-ons, and has all the keys to its own mysteries, and what still more comforting, always knows everything for certain."

It knows that you starve your servants because you re poor and like to save on the butcher and baker; knows that you overpay them because you are rich nd want them to keep your secrets, it knows that your reat-grandmother's second cousin was hanged for for-ery at Tyburn; it knows that your silk stockings have

cotton tops to them; it knows that your heirloom-guipur is imitation, made the other day at Rapallo; it knows tha your Embassy only receives you because—hush—a grea personage—ah, so very shocking; it knows that you ha green peas six weeks before anybody else; it knows tha you have had four dinner parties this week and are livin on your capital; it knows that when you were in Rom you only went to the Quirinal Wednesdays, becaus (*whisper, whisper, whisper*)—oh, indeed it is perfectl true—had it on the best authority—dreadful, incredible but perfectly true!

In point of fact there is nothing it doesn't know.

Except, to be sure, it never knows that Mrs. Potipha is not virtuous, or that Lady Messalina is not everythin she should be; this it never knows and never admits, be cause if it did it could not very well drink the Potipha champagne, and might lose for its daughters the Messa lina balls. Indeed its perpetual loquacity, which is "a the waters come down at Lodore," has most solemn an impressive interludes of refreshing dumbness and deaf ness when any incautious speaker, not trained to it ways, hints that Mrs. Potiphar lives in a queer manner or that Lady Messalina would be out of society any where else; then indeed does Anglo-Saxon Floralia dra itself up with an injured dignity, and rebuke you wit the murmur of—Christian charity.

In other respects however it has the soul of Samue Pepys multiplied by five thousand. It watched the prog ress of intimacy between Lady Hilda and the ruined lor of Palestrina, and knew "all about it,"—knew a vast dea more than the persons concerned, of course; it alway does, or what would be the use of talking?

Gossiping over its bonbons and tea in the many pleasant houses in which the south-wintering northern swallows nestle, it knew that he and she had been in love years and years before; the family would not let her marry him because he was so poor; it was the discovery of his letters to her that had killed poor old rich Vorarlberg; he and her brother had fought in the Bois—indeed!—oh yes, it was hushed up at the time, but it was quite true, and he had shot her brother in the shoulder; the surgeon who had attended the wounded man had told the physician who had attended the sister-in-law of the cousin of the most intimate friend of the lady who had vouched for this. There could not be better authority. But there never was anything against her?—oh, dear me, no, never anything—everybody said this very warmly, because everybody had been, hoped to be, or at least would not despair of being, introduced to her and asked to dinner. It was very romantic, really most interesting; they had not met for nine years, and now!—ah, that explained all her coldness then, and that extraordinary rejection of the Crown Prince of Deutschland, which nobody ever had been able to understand. But was it not strange that he had never tried to resume his old influence before? No, he was as proud as he was poor, and besides they had quarrelled after the duel with her brother; they had parted one night very bitterly, after one of the Empress's balls at St. Cloud, out on the terrace there; but he had always refused to give up her portrait; somebody had seen it upon his chest when he had been stripped in the hospital after Custozza; oh, yes, they remembered that perfectly.

Altogether they made such a very pretty story that it

was quite a pity that it was not true, and that the subjects of it had never met until the Duc de St. Louis had brought them face to face that winter. The one real truth which did begin to embitter the life of the Lady Hilda and lie heavy on her thoughts, waking and sleeping, was one that the garrulous gossiping Pepys-like northern swallows, chirping so busily, did not guess at all. Indeed, this is the sad fate which generally befalls Gossip.

It is like the poor devil in the legend of Fugger's Teuffelpalast at Trent; it toils till cock-crow picking up the widely-scattered grains of corn by millions till the bushel measure is piled high, and lo!—the five grains that are *the* grains always escape its sight and roll away and hide themselves. The poor devil, being a primitive creature, shrieked and flew away in despair at his failure. Gossip hugs its false measure and says loftily that the five real grains are of no consequence whatever.

The Duc de St. Louis, who had not got the five grains any more than they had, yet who could have told them their bushelful was all wrong, like a wise man, seeing the project of his affections in a fair way towards realization—at least, so he thought—prudently abstained from saying one word about it to any one.

"Trop de zèle" spoiled everything, he knew, from politics to omelettes, from the making of proselytes to the frying of artichokes. A breath too much has before now toppled down the most carefully built house of cards. When to let things alone is perhaps the subtlest, rarest, and most useful of all knowledge.

A man here and there has it; it may be said that no woman has, has had, or ever will have it. If Na-

oleon had had it he might have died at eighty at St. Cloud instead of St. Helena. But genius, like woman, ever has been known to have it. For genius and caution re as far apart as the poles.

"Tout va bien," the Duc said to himself, taking off is hat to her when he saw Della Rocca by her carriage; neeting them in discussion before some painting or statue nat she was about to buy; or watching them *tête-à-tête* n some couch of a ballroom, or in some nook of a gas- t grove of camellias.

"Tout va bien," said the Duc, smiling to himself, and peeding on his way to his various missions, reconcil- ng angry ladies, making the prettiest flatteries to pretty nes, seeking some unobtainable enamel, ivory, or elzevir, enning sparkling proverbs in verse, arranging costume uadrilles, preventing duels, and smiling on débutantes, djusting old quarrels, and hearing new tenors; always in whirl of engagements, always courted and courteous, lways the busiest, the wittiest, the happiest, the most rbane, the most charming, the most serene person in all 'loralia. "Tout va bien," said the Duc, and the town ith him: the two persons concerned were neither of them uite so sure.

Meanwhile, for a little space the name and fame and ays and wonders of the Lady Hilda which filled Flo- alia with a blaze as of electric lights, quelling all lesser minaries, was almost disregarded in a colossal senti- ent, a gigantic discussion, a debate which, for endless oquence and breathless conflict, would require the dithy- mbs of Pindar meetly to record:—the grave question of ho would, and who would not, go to the Postiche ball.

"Number One goes to dine with Number Two, only

that he may say he did so to Number Three," some cynic has declared; but Floralia improves even on this; before it goes to dine or dance, it spends the whole week in trying to find out who all the Number Fours will be, or in declaring that if such and such a Number Four goes it does not think it can go itself—out of principle—all which diversions wile its time away and serve to amuse it as a box of toys a child. Not that it ever fails to go and dine or dance,—only it likes to discuss it dubiously in this way.

The Postiche ball was really a thing to move society to its depths.

The wintering-swallows had never been so fluttered about anything since the mighty and immortal question of the previous season, when a Prince of the H. R. Empire, a United Netherlands Minister, and a Duc et Pair of France, had all been asked to dinner together with their respective wives at an American house, and the hostess and all the swallows with her had lived in agonies for ten days previously, torn to pieces by the terrible doubts of Precedence; beseeching and receiving countless counsels and councillors, and consulting authorities and quoting precedents with the research of Max Müller and the zeal of Dr. Kenealy.

But the Postiche ball was a much wider, indeed almost an international matter; because the Anglo-Saxon races had staked their lives that it should be a success; and the Latin and Muscovite had declared that it would be a failure; and everybody was dying to go, and yet everybody was ashamed to go, a state of mind which constitutes the highest sort of social ecstasy in this age of composite emotions.

Mr. and Mrs. Joshua R. Postiche, some said, were Jews, and some said were Dutch, and some said were half-castes from Cuba, and some said were Americans from Arkansas, and some said had been usurers, and some gin-spinners, and some opium dealers, and some things even yet worse; at any rate they had amassed, somehow or other, a great deal of money, and had therefore got into society by dint of a very large expenditure and the meekest endurance of insults; and had made an ancient palace as gaudy and garish as any brand-new hotel at Nice or Scarboro', and gathered in it all the cosmopolitan crowd of Floralia; some of the Italian planets and Muscovite stars alone hanging aloof in a loftier atmosphere, to the very great anguish of the Joshua R. Postiches.

The ball was to be a wonderful ball, and the cotillon presents were whispered to have cost thirty thousand francs, and there were various rumours of a "surprise" there would be at it, as poor Louis Napoleon used to promise the Parisians one for the New Year. Louis Napoleon's promises always ended in smoke, but the surprise of the Joshua R. Postiches was always to be reckoned on as something excellent:—salmon come straight from the Scotch rivers; lobsters stewed in tokay du krone; French comic actors fetched from Paris; some great singer, paid Heaven knew what for merely opening her mouth; some dove flying about with jewels in his beak for everybody, or something of that sort, which showed that the Joshua R. Postiches, wherever they had been "raised," or even if they had kept a drinking-bar and eating-shop in Havannah, as some people said, were at all events persons who knew the requirements of their

own generation and the way to mount into "La Haute.

Why they wanted to get there no mortal could tell, they had no children, and were both middle-aged; bu no doubt, if you have not been used to them, the card of countesses are as balm in Gilead, and to see a fashion able throng come up your staircase is to have attaine the height of human desire.

At any rate, the Joshua R. Postiches had set thei souls on this sort of social success, and they achieve it; receiving at their parties many distinguished and in finitely bored personages who had nothing to do in Flo ralia, and would have cut them in Paris, Vienna, or Lon don, with the blandest and blankest stare of uncon sciousness.

Madame Mila was on the point of adding herself t those personages.

"I *must* go to the ball," she said. "Oh, it will b the best thing of the season except Nina Trasimene's— must go to the ball—but then I can't endure to know the woman."

"Can't you go without knowing her?" said the Lad Hilda. "That has been done——"

Madame Mila did not feel the satire.

"Yes; one could do it in Paris or London; but no in a little place like this," she answered, innocently. " must let them present her to me—and I must leave card. That is what's so horrid. The woman is dread ful; she murders all the languages, and the man's al ways looking about for a spittoon, and calls you my lady They are too dreadful! But I must go to the ball. Be sides, our own people want Maurice to lead the cotillon

Now Guido Salvareo is ill, there's nobody that can come near Maurice——"

"But I suppose he would not dare to go if you were not there?"

"Of course he would not go; the idea! But I mean to go—I must go. I'm only thinking how I can get out of knowing the woman afterwards. It's so difficult in a small place, and I am always so good-natured in those things. I suppose it's no use asking you to come, Hilda? else, if you would, *you* could cut them afterwards most deliciously, and I should do as you did. Left to myself, I'm always too good-natured."

"I would do most things to please you, my dear Mila," answered her cousin, "but I don't think I can do that. You know it's my rule never to visit people that I won't let visit me—and I don't like murdered languages, and being called 'my lady.'"

"Oh, the people are horrid—I say so," answered the Comtesse. "I shall have nothing to do with them, of course—after their ball."

"But surely, it's very low, Mila, that sort of thing. I know people do it nowadays. But really, to be a guest of a person you intend to cut next day——"

"What does it matter? She wants my name on her list; she gets it; I'm not bound to give her anything more. There is nothing unfair about it. She has what she wants, and more than she could expect. Of course, all that kind of persons must know perfectly well that we only go to them as we go to the opera, and have no more to do with them than we have with the opera door-keepers. Of course they know we don't visit them

as we visit our own people. But if snobbish creatures like those find pleasure in entertaining us, though they know quite well what we think of them, and how we esteem them, and why we go to them—well, I don't see that they deserve anything better."

"Nor I," said the Lady Hilda. "Only I shouldn't go to them—that's all. And it *is* very funny, my love, that you, who have lived in all the great courts of Europe, and have had your own Embassy in London, should care one straw for a ball at the Joshua R. Postiches'. Good gracious! You must have seen about seventy thousand balls in your time!"

"I am only six years older than you, Hilda," said she, tartly. "I suppose you've been telling Della Rocca not to go to the Postiches'—Olga and the Baroness and Madame Valkyria, and scores of them have been trying to persuade him all the week, because if he stay away so many of the other men will; and none of us can stir him an inch about it. 'On peut être de très-braves gens—mais je n'y vais pas,' that is all he says; as if their being 'braves gens' or not had anything to do with it; and yet I saw him the other day with his hand on a contadino's shoulder in the market-place, and he was calling him 'carissimo mio.' "

"One of his own peasants, most likely," said the Lady Hilda, coldly. "I have never heard these Postiches even mentioned by M. Della Rocca, and I certainly have nothing whatever to do with where he goes or doesn't go."

"He is always with you, at any rate," said Madame Mila; "and if you would make him go, it would only be kind of you. You see we want *everybody* we know,

so that we may be sure to make the square dances only of our own people, and not to see anything of anybody the Postiches may have asked themselves. Little Dickie Dorrian, who's managing it all, said to the woman Postiche, 'I'll bring the English division if you'll spend enough on the cotillon toys; but I won't undertake the Italians.' Now if Della Rocca——"

"Would you want a new dress, Mila?" said the Lady Hilda; "I am sure you must if you're going to a woman you can't know the next day."

"I should like one, of course," said the Comtesse, "but I've had thirty new ones this season already—and what I owe Worth!—not to talk of the Maison Roger——"

"Let me give you one," said the Lady Hilda. "Worth will do anything at short notice for either of us; and I must think this poor Postiche woman ought to see you in a new dress, as she's never to see you again."

"You are a darling, Hilda!" said Madame Mila, with ardent effusion, rising to kiss her cousin.

Lady Hilda turned to let the caress fall on the old guipure lace fichu round her throat, and drew her writing-things to her to pen a telegram to M. Worth.

"I suppose you don't care to say what colour?" she asked as she wrote.

"Oh, no," answered the Comtesse. "He remembers all the combinations I've had much better than I do. You dictate to him a little too much; I've heard him say so——"

"He never said so to me," said the Lady Hilda, with a laugh. "Of course I dictate to him. Whatever taste your dressmaker, man or woman, may have—and he has genius—there are little touches which should always

come from oneself, and which can alone give originality. That is why all that herd of women, who really do go to Worth but yet are nobodies, look hardly the better for him: he thinks about us, and we think about ourselves; but he doesn't think about them, and as they have no thought themselves the result is that they all look as conventional and similar as if they were dolls dressed for a bazaar. Women ought to be educated to more sense of colour and form. Even an ugly woman ought to be taught that it is her duty to make her ugliness as little disagreeable as possible. If the eyes and the taste of women were cultivated by artistic study, an ill-dressed woman would become an impossibility. If I were ever so poor," continued the Lady Hilda impressively, "if I were ever so poor, and had to sew my own gowns, and make them of serge or of dimity, I would cut them so that Giorgione or Gainsborough, if they were living, would be able to look at me with complacency—or at all events without a shudder. It is not half so much a question of material as it is of taste. But nowadays the people who cannot afford material have no taste; so that after us, and the women whom Worth manages to make look decently in spite of themselves, there is nothing but a multitude of hideously-attired persons, who make the very streets appalling either by dreariness or gaudiness: —they never have any medium. Now a peasant girl of the Marche, or of the Agro Romana, or of the Pays de Vaud, is charming, because her garments have beauty of hue in them, and that other beauty which comes from perfect suitability and—— Ah! come sta, Duca?"

She interrupted herself, and turned to Della Rocca, who was standing behind her, the servant's announce-

ment of him having been unheard: it was her day to receive.

"Oh, that the rest of your sex, Madame," he said, after his salutations were made, "could sit at your feet and take in those words of wisdom! Yes, I heard most that you said; I can understand your tongue a little; you are so right; it is the duty of every woman to make herself as full of grace as she can; all cannot be lovely, but none need be unlovely."

"Exactly; women are reproached with thinking too much about dress, but the real truth is, they do not think enough about it—in the right way. They talk about it dreadfully, in the vulgarest fashion, but bring any thought to it they don't. Most women will wear anything if it be only *de rigueur*. I believe if I, and Princess Metternich, and Madame de Gallifet, and Madame Aguado, and a few like us wore that pea-green silk coat and waistcoat which the Advanced Thought Ladies of America are advocating as the best new kind of dress for women, that you would see ten thousand pea-green coats and waistcoats blazing in the streets the week afterwards——"

"Not a bad idea for the Cotton Costume ball," said Madame Mila. "I will have a pea-green coat and waistcoat, a tall hat, and hessians; and call myself 'Advanced Thought.'"

"To be completely in character, Mila, you must have blue spectacles, a penny whistle, a phial full of nostrums, a magpie for your emblem, and a calico banner, inscribed 'Everything is Nothing!'——"

"Charming! It shall be the best thing there. Draw it for me, Della Rocca, and I will send the sketch to

Paris, so that it can all come in a box together, magpie and all."

He drew a sheet of paper to him, and sketched the figure in ink, with spirit.

"You have all the talents—so many thanks," said Madame Mila, looking over his shoulder.

Della Rocca sighed.

"If I have them I have buried them, Madame—but, indeed, I can make no such claim."

"So many thanks," echoed the Comtesse. "Pray, don't say a word about it, or we shall have a dozen 'Advanced Thoughts' in calico. Hilda, I am just going to Nina's to see about the *Muscadins*. I have resolved we shall play that piece or no other. I shall be back in ten minutes, ask Olga to wait"; and Madame Mila wafted herself out of the room, and downstairs to the courtyard, where the coupé and the exemplary Maurice were waiting.

"How she does amuse herself!" said Lady Hilda, a little enviously. "I wish I could do it. What *can* it matter whether they play the *Muscadins* or anything else!"

"Plus on est fou, plus on rit," said Della Rocca, sketching arabesques with his pen. "Nay, that is too impolite in me to charming Madame Mila. But, like all old proverbs, it is more true than elegant.

"Do you know, Madame," he continued, with a little hesitation, "I have often ventured to think that, despite your brilliancy, and your position, and all your enviable fate, you are not altogether—quite happy? Am I right? Or have I committed too great an impertinence to be answered?"

"No impertinence whatever," said the Lady Hilda, a little wearily. "You may be right; I don't know; I am not unhappy certainly; I have nothing to be unhappy about; but—most things seem very stupid to me. I confess Mila's endless diversions and excitements are quite beyond me. There is such a terrible sameness in everything."

"Because you have no deeper interests," he answered her. He still sat near her at her writing-table beside the fire, and was playing with the little jewelled boy who held her pen-wiper.

She did not answer him; and he continued:

"I think you have said yourself, Madame, the cause why everything seems more or less wearisome to you—you have 'nothing to be unhappy about'; that is—you have no one for whom you care."

He thought that her proud delicate face coloured a little; or it might be the warmth from the fire of oak-logs and pine-cones.

"No; I don't care about people," she answered him indifferently. "When you have seen a person a few times—it is enough. It is like a book you have read through; the interest is gone; you know the *mot d'énigme.*"

"You speak of society; I spoke of affections."

The Lady Hilda laughed a little.

"I can't follow you. I do not feel them. I like Clairvaux, my brother, certainly, but we go years without seeing each other quite contentedly."

"I spoke of affections, other affections," replied Della Rocca, with a little impatience. "There is nothing else that gives warmth or colour to life. Without them

there is no glow to its pictures, they are all painted *en grisaille*. Pleasure alone cannot content any one whose character has any force, or mind any high intelligence. Society is, as you say, a book we soon read through, and know by heart till it loses all interest. Art alone cannot fill more than a certain part of our emotions; and culture, however perfect, leaves us unsatisfied. There is only one thing that can give to life what your poet called the light that never was on sea or land—and that is human love."

His eyes rested on her; and for once in her life her own eyes fell; a troubled softness came for a moment on her face, dispersing all its languor and its coldness. In another moment she recovered herself, and smiled a little.

"Ah! you are *appasionato*, as becomes your country."

Della Rocca looked at her with something of disappointment and something of distaste; he rose and approached the grand piano.

"You allow me?" he said, and touched a few of the chords. He sang very low, and almost as it were to himself, a canzone of the people—

> "Si tu mi lasci, lasciar non ti voglio,
> Se m' abbandoni, ti vo seguitare
> Se passi il mare, il mar passare io voglio,
> Se giri il mondo, il mondo vo' girare," etc.

The words were very simple, but the melody was passionate and beautiful; his voice, so low at first, rose louder, with all the yearning tenderness in it with which the song is laden; and the soft sounds echoed through the silent room, as they had echoed ten thousand times

in moonlit nights of midsummer, over the land where Romeo and Stradella and Aristo loved.

His voice sank softly into silence; and Lady Hilda did not move.

There was a mist that was almost like tears in her proud eyes; she gazed into the fire, with her cheek leaning on her hand; she did not speak to him; there was no sound but the falling of some burning wood upon the hearth.

"The simplest contadina in the land would understand that," he said as he rose; "and you, great lady though you are, cannot? Madame, there are things, after all, that you have missed."

"Go back and sing again," she said to him, taking no notice of his words; "I did not know you ever sang——"

"Every Italian does;—or well or ill," he answered her. "We are born with music in us, like the birds."

"But in society who hears you?"

"No one. An atmosphere of gas, candles, ennui, perfume, heat, and inane flatteries! ah no, Madame—music is meant for silence, moonlight, vinepaths, summer nights——"

"This is winter and firelight, a few armchairs and a great deal of street noise; all the same, go back and sing me more."

She spoke indifferently and lightly, leaning her hand back on her chair, and hiding a little yawn with her hand; she would not have him see that he had touched her to any foolish, momentary weakness. But he had seen. He smiled a little.

"As you command," he answered, and he went back and made her music as she wished; short love lyrics of

the populace, sonnets set to noble airs, wild mournful boat-songs, and snatches of soft melodies, such as echo all the harvest-time through the firefly-lighted corn: things all familiar to him from his infancy, but to her unknown, and full of the force and the yearning of the passion which was unknown to her also, and in a certain way derided by her.

He broke off abruptly, and came and leaned on the chimney-piece near her, with his arm amongst the little pug-dogs in Saxe, and figures and fountains in Capo di Monte, which she had collected in a few weeks from the bric-à-brac people. He did not speak; he only looked at her where she sat, with the firelight and the dying daylight on the silver fox-furs fringing her dress, on the repoussé gold and silver work of her loose girdle, on the ends of the old Spanish lace about her throat; on the great rings that sparkled on her white fingers, which were lying so idly clasped together on her lap.

"You sing very beautifully," she said, calmly, at length, with her eyes half closed and her head lying back on the chair-cushions. "It is very strange that you should be so mute in society."

"I never sang to a crowd in my life, and never would. Music is an impulse, or it is nothing. I could never sing save to some woman who——"

He paused a moment.

"Who was music in herself," he added with a smile; it was not what had been upon his lips.

"Then you should not have sung to me," she said, still with half-closed eyes and a careless coldness in her voice. "I am all discord; have you not found that out? —every woman is, nowadays; we have lost the secret

of harmony; we are always wanting to be excited, and never succeeding in being anything but bored."

"These are mere words, Madame," he answered her. "I hope they are not true. By discord I think you only mean inconsistency. Pardon me—but I think you are all so wearied because of the monotony of your lives. I dare say that sounds very strangely to you, because you pursue all the pleasure and all the extravagances that are obtainable. But then all these are no novelties, they are merely habits. Habit is nothing better than a harness; even when it is one silvered and belled. You have exhausted everything too early; how can it have flavour? You pursue an unvarying routine of amusement: how can it amuse? The life of the great world is, after all, when we once know it well, as tiresome as the life of the peasant—perhaps more so. I know both."

"All that may be right enough," said the Lady Hilda, "but there is no help for it that I see. If the world is not amusing, that is not our fault. In the Beau Siècle, perhaps, or in Augustan Rome——"

"Be very sure it was the same thing. An artificial life must grow tiresome to any one with a mind above that of a parrot or a monkey. If we can be content with it, we deserve nothing better. What you call your discord is nothing but your dissatisfaction—the highest part of you. If it were not treason to say so, treason against this exquisite apparel, I would say that you would be more likely to know happiness were you condemned to the serge and the dimity you spoke of to Madame Mila an hour ago."

He had sunk on a stool at her feet as he spoke, and caressed the silver fox and the gold girdle lightly; his

hand touched hers in passing, and her face grew warm. She put a feather screen between her and the fire.

"That is the old argument of content in the cottage, etc.," she said, with a slight laugh. "I do not believe in it in the least. If it be 'best repenting in a coach and six' it must be best to be bored in an armchair——"

"Perhaps! It is not I, certainly, who should praise poverty!" he said with some bitterness, and more sadness; "and, indeed, poverty or riches has little to do with the question of happiness; happiness can come but from one thing——"

"A good conscience? How terribly moral you are."

"No:—from our emotions, from our passions, from our sympathies; in fine, from Love."

His hand still played with the gold gypsire of the girdle as he sat at her feet; his eyes were lifted to her face; his voice was very low; in all his attitude and action and regard there were an unuttered solicitation, an eloquence of unspoken meaning; she was silent:—then the door opened; he dropped the girdle, and rose to his feet; there came a patter of high heels, and a chime of swift aristocratic voices; and into the room there entered the Princess Olga, attended by her constant shadow, Don Carlo Maremma, with Lady Featherleigh behind her, accompanied by *her* attendant, Prince Nicolas Doggondorf.

"Ma chère, there is a regular riot going on at Nina's," said the Princess Olga, advancing with both hands outstretched. "All about those *Muscadins*. Mila has seceded in full form, and, of course, M. des Gommeux with her. Blanche will only play if they have *'Il fau*

qu'une porte,' etc., which is as old as the hills, and Mila won't play at all if Blanche be allowed to play anything. They have quarrelled for life, so have Mila and Nina. They are slanging each other like two street boys. Alberto Rimini is on his knees between them, and the Duc is declaring for the five thousandth time that it is the last he will ever have to do with theatricals. I left while I could escape with life. What a pity it is that playing for charity always develops such fierce hostilities. Well, Paolo,—have you thought better of the Postiche ball? No? How stiff-necked you are! I do believe Carlo will be the only Italian there!"

"It will be a distinction to inscribe on his tombstone, Madame," said Della Rocca. "But then he goes under command——"

"And under protest," murmured Don Carlo.

"Which does not count. When one is no longer a free agent——"

Princess Olga hit him a little blow with her muff.

"But why should you not go to the Postiches? Just as you go to the Veglione; it is nothing more."

"Madame,—I am very old-fashioned in my ideas, I dare say, but I confess I think that no one should accept as a host a person he would never accept as his guest. I may be wrong——"

"Of course you are wrong. That is not the question at all," said Princess Olga, who did not like people to differ with her. "Joshua R. Postiche will never dream of being asked to shoot your wild ducks or your partridges. All he wants is that you should just be seen going up his staircase, and drinking his champagne. Society is full of Postiches: low people, with a craze for enter-

taining high people. They don't care how we insult them, nor how we laugh at them, provided our cards lie in the bowl in their hall. We take them at their own valuation, and treat them as we treat the waiters at Spillman's or Doney's; we have paid the bill with our cards."

"That is to say, we have paid with our names—which should represent all the honour, dignity, and self-respect that we have inherited, and are bound to maintain, for our own sakes and for those who may come after us."

"Oh, mon Dieu, quel grand sérieux!" cried the Princess, impatiently. "But, of course, if you've been sitting with Hilda you have got more stiff-necked than ever. What do you say, Hilda? Isn't it ill-natured of him? He need only walk in, bow once to the woman, and look on at the edge of the ballroom for twenty minutes. The other men will go if he will do as much as that."

"I think M. della Rocca quite right not 'to do as much as that,'" said the Lady Hilda. "Why Society ever does as much as that, or half as much, or anything at all, for Joshua R. Postiche, I can never tell. As it does,—to be consistent everybody should dine with the fruit woman from the street corner, and play écarté with their own chimney sweeps."

"Oh, we shall come to that, Madame," said Nicolas Doggondorf. "At least, if chimney sweeping ever make heaps of money; I don't think it does; it only chokes little boys——"

"Ce bon Monsieur Postiche sold rum and molasses," murmured Don Carlo.

"What's it to us what he sold?" said Lady Featherleigh. "We've nothing to do with him; we're only go-

ing to his ball. You talk as if we asked the man to dinner."

"What does the Archduchess Anna always say: 'Où je m'amuse—j'y vais.' So do we all. I hear he has been put up for the Club; is it true?" added the Princess to Carlo Maremma.

"Yes, Krunensberg has put him up," he answered her, "but he shall never get into it, while there are any of us alive."

"Et s'il n'y a qu'un, moi je serai celui-là," quoted Della Rocca.

"But he has lent Krunensberg Heaven knows what—some say two million francs," said Lady Featherleigh.

Prince Krunensberg was a great personage, and, for a foreigner, of great influence in the Club.

"Chère dame," said Della Rocca, "if we elect all Krunensberg's creditors we shall have to cover three streets with our club-house!"

"Oh, my dear! I am half dead!" cried Madame Mila, flashing into the room, gorgeous in the feathers of the golden pheasant, arranged on the most exquisite combination of violet satin and bronze velvet, and throwing her muff on one side of her and her parasol on the other, while Maurice des Gommeux, who was the most admirable of upper servants, stooped for them and smoothed their ruffled elegance. "I am half dead! Such a scene I never went through in my life. I, who hate scenes, and never have any hardly even with Spiridion! Oh, has Olga told you? Yes; it is horrible, infamous, intolerable!—after all I have done for that odious Dumb Asylum—and my costumes ordered for the *Muscadins,* and half the part learnt! It is all Krunensberg's do-

ing—and the Duc didn't stand out one half as he should have done; and Blanche!—the idea—the little wretch is made of wood, and can't even open her mouth! As for Krunensberg, he deserves to be shot! It is all his influence that has set Nina against the *Muscadins*—just to spite me! What I have gone through about this wretched theatre—and then to have that little chit of a Blanche set over my head, a little creature, only married out of her convent last year;—it is unbearable; of course, neither I nor Des Gommeux shall play. Oh, here comes the Duc;—no, Duc, it is not the slightest use! If you have that ridiculous musty old piece of De Musset's, or if you have Blanche in it at all you don't have Me in anything. A nice morning's work you have made of it! Nina and I shall never speak again."

The Duc laid his hat aside; his delicate features were puckered, weary, and troubled.

"Mais, Madame, pardon!—mais vous avez toutes dit les choses les plus affreuses!——"

"Women always do, Duc, when they are in a passion," said Lady Hilda. "There is nothing like a scene for discovering our real opinions of one another. Why! you look actually—worried! I thought nothing ever ruffled you by any chance whatever."

"Madame," said M. de St. Louis, stretching himself, with a sigh, in a low chair beside her and the fire, "I have always sedulously cultivated serenity. I believe serenity to be the whole secret of human health, happiness, longevity, good taste, sound judgment, everything in point of fact that is desirable in the life of a human being. But, alas! we are all mortal, and our best plans

re but finite. In an evil moment, when Pandora's box as packed, there was put in with it by the malice of Mercury a detonating powder, called Amateur Rivalry. When all the other discords were dispersed, this shot self into the loveliest forms and the gentlest bosoms; nd where it explodes—the wisest man stands helpless. He cannot reconcile the warring elements nor retain ny personal peace himself. I am the slave of Madame Mila; I adore the dust of the exquisite shoes of Madame Nina; I am penetrated with the most absolute devotion o Madame Blanche;—when these heavenly graces are eady to rend each other's hair, what can I do? What an I be except the most unhappy person upon earth? To reconcile ladies who are infuriated is a hopeless ream; it were easier to make whole again a broken lass of Venice. It makes one almost wish," added the Duc with a second sigh, "almost wish that Molière had ever been created, or, being created, had never written. ut for Molière I doubt very much if the Drama, as an rt, would have lingered on to the present time."

"Console yourself, my dear Duc," said Lady Hilda, console yourself with a line from Molière: 'Cinq ou x coups de bâton entre gens qui s'aiment ne font que agaillardir l'amitié.' Mila, Nina, and Blanche will kiss ach other tomorrow; they must, or what becomes of the reat Contes de Mère d'Oie Quadrille to open the oubleskoff ball next week?"

"I shall never speak to either of them as long as live," said Madame Mila, still ruffling all her golden eathers in highest wrath. "As for the quadrille—the oubleskoff must do as they can. I do think Krunens-

berg has made Nina perfectly odious; I never saw any body so altered by a man in my life. Well, there's one thing, it won't last. His 'affairs' never do."

"It will last as long as her jewels do," said Carlo Maremma.

"Oh, no, he can't be quite so bad as that."

"Foi d'honneur!—since he left the Sant' Anselmo you have never seen her family diamonds except in the Paris paste replica, which she tells you she wears for safety, and because it is such a bore to have to employ policemen in plain clothes at the balls——"

"Talk of policemen!" said Madame Mila, "they say we're to have a caution sent us from the Prefecture about our playing baccarat the other night at the café—they say no gambling is allowed in the city—the idea!"

"While the State organizes the lotteries!—how very consistent," said the Lady Hilda.

"All your gaming is against the law, angels of my soul," said Carlo Maremma.

"Then we'll all leave Floralia," said Madame Mila. "The idea of not being able to do what one chooses in one's own rooms!—there is one thing, we can always go up to Roubleskoff's;—they will never dare to caution him. But what is the use of all this fuss?—everybody plays—everybody always will play."

"The Prefect is much too wise a man ever to imagine he can prevent ladies doing what they like," said Maremma. "It is those tremendous losses of young De Fabris the other night that have made a stir, and the Prefect thinks it necessary to say something; he is afraid of a scandal."

"Good gracious! As if anything filled a city half so

well as a scandal! Why don't Floralia have a good gaming place like Monte Carlo? we shouldn't want to use our own rooms then——"

"I confess," said the Duc, in his gentle, meditative voice, "I confess that, like Miladi here, I fail to altogether appreciate the moral horror of a game at baccarat entertained by a municipality which in its legislation legalizes the lottery. All gaming may be prejudicial to the moral health of mankind; it is certainly so to their purses. I am prepared to admit, even in face of Madame Mila's direst wrath, that all forms of hazard are exceedingly injurious to the character and to the fortunes of every person tempted by them. It may be impossible even to exaggerate their baneful influences or their disastrous consequences. But how can a government which publicly patronizes, sustains, and enriches itself by lotteries, have any logic in condemning the pastime of hazard in a private drawing-room or a private club-house? I confess I cannot see how they reconcile both courses. A government, whatever it be, should never be an anomaly."

"Lotteries are to us what bull-fighting is to Spaniards, and revolutions are to the French," said Carlo Maemma. "Every nation has its especial craze. The lottery is ours."

"But is it for a government to intensify and pander to, and profit by a national insanity?" said Della Rocca with much seriousness. "When Rome bent to the yell of Panem et Circenses, the days of her greatness were numbered. Besides, the Duc is quite right—it is a ridiculous anomaly to condemn games while you allow lotteries. Great harm may result from private gam-

bling—greater still from the public gaming-tables—but the evil after all is not a millionth part so terrible as the evil resulting from the system of public lotteries. The persons who are ruined by ordinary gaming, are, after all, persons who would certainly be ruined by some vice or another. The compound of avarice and excitement which makes the attraction of hazard does not allure the higher kinds of character; besides, the vice does not go to the player—the player goes to the vice. Now, on the contrary, the lottery attacks openly, and tries to allure in very despite of themselves the much wider multitude that is the very sap and support of a nation—it entices the people themselves. It lures the workman to throw away his wage—the student to spend his time in feverish dreams—the simple day-labourer to consume his content in senseless calculations that often bring his poor empty brain to madness. The lottery assails them in the street, is carried to them in their homes, drops them some poor prize at first to chain them in torment for ever afterwards. It changes honesty to cunning, peace to burning desire, industry to a perpetual waiting upon chance, manly effort to an imbecile abandonment to the dictates of signs and portents, and the expectancy of a fortune which never comes. High-born gamblers are only the topmost leaves of the tree of the State; they may rot away without detriment to the tree, but the lottery lays the ax to the very trunk and root of it, because it demoralizes the people."

Lady Hilda listened, and watched him as he spoke with a grave and almost tender meditation in her eyes which M. de St. Louis saw, and seeing, smiled.

"Say all that in the Chamber, caro mio," muttered Carlo Maremma.

"I would go to the Chambers to say it, or to worse places even, were there any chance it would be attended to. Madamė Mila, have I been so unhappy as to have offended you?"

"I am a top leaf that may rot! I was never told anything so rude in my life—from you too! the very soul of ceremonious courtesy."

Della Rocca made his peace with her in flowery flattery.

"Well, I shall play baccarat tonight in this hotel, just because the Prefect has been so odious and done that," said Madame Mila. "You will all come home with me after the Roubleskoffs' dinner? Promise!"

"Of course," said the Princess Olga.

"Of course," said Lady Featherleigh.

"Of course," said everybody else.

"And if the gendarmes come in?"

"We will shoot them!"

"No; we will give them champagne—surer and more humane."

"I wish the Prefect would come himself—I should like to tell him my mind," continued Madame Mila. "So impudent of the man!—when all the Royal Highnesses and Grand Dukes and Duchesses in Europe only come to winter cities for play. He *must* know that."

"My dear Mila, how you do put yourself out about it," said the Lady Hilda. "Send ten thousand francs to the public charities—you may play all night long in the cafés then."

"Madame, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer," murmured Della Rocca, bending low before her.

When the door had closed upon him and left the others behind, a sudden blankness and dullness seemed to fall on her: she had never felt the same thing before. Bored she had often been, but this was not *ennui*, it was a kind of loneliness—it was as if all about her grew grey and cold and stupid.

More ladies came in, there were endless laughter and chatter; Princess Olga wanted some tea, and had it; the other women cracked bonbons with their little teeth like pretty squirrels cracking fir-cones; they made charming groups in the firelight and lamplight; they made plans for a hundred diversions; they were full of the gayest of scandals; they dissected in the most merciless manner all their absent friends; they scolded their lovers and gave them a thousand contradictory orders; they discussed all the news and all the topics of the day, and arranged for dinner parties, and driving parties, and costume quadrilles, and bazaar stalls, and boxes at the theatre, and suppers at the cafés; and agreed that everything was as dull as ditchwater, and yet that they never had a minute for anything; and the Lady Hilda with the jubilant noise and the twittering laughter round her, thought how silly they all were, and what a nuisance it was having a day —only if one hadn't a day it was worse still, because then they were always trying to run in at all hours on every day, and one was never free for a moment.

"Thank goodness, they are gone!" she said, half aloud, to the Saxe cups and the Capo di Monte children on the mantelpiece, when the last flutter of fur and velvet had vanished through the door, and the last of those dearest

friends and born foes had kissed each other and separated.

Left alone, she stood thinking, by the fire, with all the lights burning behind her in that big, empty room. What she thought was a very humble and pensive thought for só disdainful a lady. It was only——

"Is it myself? or only the money?"

She stood some time there, motionless, her hand playing with the gold girdle as his hand had done; her face was pale, softened, troubled.

The clock amongst the Saxe dogs and the Capo di Monte little figures chimed the half-hour after six. She started as it struck, and remembered that she was to dine at eight with the Princess Roubleskoff; a big party for an English royalty on his travels.

"Anyhow, it would be of no use," she said to herself. "Even if I did wish it, it could never be."

And she was angry with herself, as she had been the night before; she was impatient of these new weaknesses which haunted her. Nevertheless she was more particular about her appearance that night than her maids had ever known her be; she was very difficult to satisfy; tried and discarded four wholly new confections of her friend Worth, miracles of invention and of costliness, and at length had herself dressed quite simply in black velvet, only relieved by all her diamonds.

"He said fair women should always wear black," she thought: it was not her Magister of Paris of whom she was thinking as the sayer of that wise phrase. And then again she was angry with herself for remembering such a thing, and attiring herself in obedience to it, and would have had herself undressed again only there was but one small quarter of an hour in which to reach the Rouble-

skoff villa, a palace of the fairies four miles from the south-gate. So she went as she was; casting a dubious impatient glance behind her at the mirrors.

"I look well," she thought with a smile, and her content returned.

She knew that he would be present at the dinner. There is no escaping destiny in Floralia: people meet too often.

The dinner disappointed her.

She thought it very long and very stupid. She sat between the Grand Duke of Rittersbähn and the Envoy of all the Russias, and Della Rocca was not placed within her sight; and after the dinner the young English Prince would talk to no one but herself, delightedly recalling to her how often she had bowled his wickets down when they had been young children playing on the lawns at Osborne. She felt disloyally thankless for his preference. He monopolized her. And as the rooms filled with the crowd of the reception she merely saw the delicate dark head of Della Rocca afar off, bent down in eager and possibly tender conversation with his beautiful countrywoman, the Duchess Medici-Malatesta. She felt angered and impatient.

If she had sat alone and neglected, as less lovely women often do, instead of being monopolized by a prince, with twenty other men sighing to take his place when etiquette should permit them, she could scarcely have been more ill-content.

Never in all her life had it befallen her to think angrily of another woman's beauty; and now she caught herself irritatedly conning, across the width of the room, the classic profile and the immense jewel-like eyes of the

Malatesta Semiramis. Never in all her life had it happened to her to miss any one thing that she desired, and ow a strange sense of loneliness and emptiness came pon her, unreasoned and unreasoning; and she had such n impatience and contempt of herself too all the while! –that was the most bitter part of it.

After all it was too absurd,——

As soon as the departure of the royal guests permitted any one to leave, she went away, contemptuous, l at ease, and out of temper with herself and all the orld; half ignorant of what moved her, and half unilling to probe her own emotions further.

"Plus on est fou, plus on rit," she murmured to her illow two hours later with irritable disdain, as she eard the voices of Mme. Mila and her troop noisily assing her door as they returned to their night-long accarat, which was to be doubly delightful because of ne Prefect's interdict.

"I wish I had been born an idiot!" thought the Lady Hilda—as, indeed, any one must do who finds himself urdened with aching brains in this best of all possible orlds.

"Perhaps, after all, you were right," said the Duc de t. Louis, driving back into the town with Della Rocca nat night. "Perhaps you were right. Miladi is most ovely, most exquisite, most perfect. But she has carices—there is no denying that she has caprices and xtravagancies which would ruin any one short of the despotic sovereign of a very wealthy nation."

The Duc was a very wise man, and knew that the scalier dérobé is the only way that leads in conversation any direct information. Their demeanour had puz-

zled him, and he spoke accordingly with shrewd design

Della Rocca heard him with a little annoyance.

"She has not more caprices than other women tha I know of," he answered. "Her faults are the faults rather of her *monde* than of herself."

"But she has adopted them with much affection!"

"They are habits—hardly more."

"And you were correct too in your diagnosis when you saw her first," continued the Duc, pitilessly. "To me she is most amiable always; but to the generality of people, it must be admitted that she is not so amiable."

"The amiability of most women," replied Della Rocca "is nothing more than that insatiate passion for admiration which makes them show their persons almost nude at Trouville, and copy the ways and manners of *femmes entretenues* in the endeavour to rival such with us. If they wish to be decent, they do not dare to be; they must be popular and *chic* before all."

"You are severe, but perhaps you are right. Milady is certainly above all such vulgarities. Indeed, she is only a little too much above everything——"

"It is better than to be below everything—even below our respect—as most of our great ladies are."

"Certainly. Still she is a little—a little selfish."

"How should she be otherwise? She is quite alone—she has no one to care for——"

"Most women make something to care for; she has many family ties, if she cared for them—but she does not. No; she is beautiful, charming, *grande dame et tout*—but I begin to think that it is well for the peace of mankind that she remains so invulnerable. She would

probably make any man who loved her very unhappy if she married him."

"If he were a weak man, not otherwise."

"Pouf! Do you think any man would ever have control over *her?*"

"I am quite sure that she would never care for any man who had not."

"He would be a very bold person," murmured the Duc. "However, I am very glad that you think more highly of her. You know, mon cher, what always was my opinion as to yourself——"

Della Rocca coloured, and saw too late that his companion had forced his card from his hands in the most adroit manner. He busied himself with lighting a cigar.

"For myself," he said, coldly, "I can have no object in what I say. My own poverty is barrier sufficient. But I should be unjust not to admit what I think of her, as a friend. I believe that the habits of the world are not so strong with her that they can satisfy her; and I believe that with her affections touched, with tenderer ties than she has ever known, with a home, with children, with a woman's natural life, in fact, she would be a much happier and very different person. Mais tout cela ne me regarde pas."

The Duc glanced at him and laughed softly, with much amusement.

"Ça vous regarde de bien près—bon succès et bon soir!" he said, as he got out of his carriage at his hôtel in the city. "I told him to marry her," he thought; "but if he expect to convert her too, he must be the boldest and most sanguine man in Europe."

Lady Hilda made up her mind that she was tired of Floralia, as she meditated over her chocolate the next morning, after a night which chloral had made pretty passable, only the baccarat people had screamed so loudly with laughter on the other side of the corridor, that they had awakened her once or twice. Yes, she certainly was tired of it. The town was charming,—but then one couldn't live on pictures, marbles, and recollections, and one got so sick of seeing the same people morning, noon, and night. The fogs were very bad. The drainage was dreadful. The thermometer was very nearly what it was in Normandy or Northamptonshire for what she could see. If one did take the trouble to go into society, one might as well do it all for a big world and not a little one. It was utter nonsense about her lungs in Paris. She would go back. She would telegraph her return to Hubert.

Hubert was her maître d'hôtel.

She did telegraph, and told herself that she would find immense interest in the fresco paintings which were being executed in the ballroom of that very exquisite hôtel "entre cour et jardin," which she had deserted in Paris, and in making nooks and corners in her already overfilled tables and cabinets for the tazze and bacini and ivories and goldsmith's work she had collected in the last two months; and decided that the wall decorations of the drawing-rooms, which were of rose satin, with Louis Quinze panelling, were all very barbarous, utterly incorrect, and should never have been borne with so long, and should be altered at once; the palest amber satin was the only possible thing, with silver mirrors and silver cornices, and not a touch of gilding anywhere; the idea

ıd occurred to her before a picture in the galleries, here a silver casket was painted against an amber cur- in; she would have it done immediately, and she would back to Paris and have her old Thursday evenings gain.

After all, Paris was the only place worth living in, ıd doctors were always alarmists—old women—every- ing that was stupid, unless you were very, very ill, hen they did seem to dilate into demi-gods, because course you were weakened with morphine and other uff, and did not want to die; though you ought to want die, being a Christian, if you were in the very least egree consistent; since if you were quite sure that the ext world would be so very much better than this, it as utterly illogical to be afraid of going to it:—but en were you quite sure?

The Lady Hilda sighed. This dreadful age, which ıs produced communists, pétroleuses, and liberal thinkers, ıd communicated its vague restlessness even to her; al- ough she belonged to that higher region where nobody er thinks at all, and everybody is more or less devout seeming at any rate, because disbelief is vulgar, and ligion is an "affaire des mœurs," like decency, still e subtle philosophies and sad negations which have ways been afloat in the air since Voltaire set them fly- g, had affected her slightly.

She was a true believer, just as she was a well-dressed oman, and had her creeds just as she had her bath in e morning, as a matter of course.

Still, when she did come to think of it, she was not very sure. There was another world, and saints and ıgels and eternity, yes, of course,—but how on earth

would all those baccarat people ever fit into it? Wh could, by any stretch of imagination, conceive Madam Mila and Maurice des Gommeux in a spiritual existenc around the throne of Deity?

And as for punishment and torment and all that othe side of futurity, who could even think of the mildes purgatory as suitable to those poor flippertygibbet in anities who broke the seventh commandment as gaily a a child breaks his indiarubber ball, and were as incapabl of passion and crime as they were incapable of heroism and virtue?

There might be paradise for virtue, and hell for crime but what in the name of the universe was to be don with creatures that were only all Folly? Perhaps the would be always flying about like the souls Virgil speak of, "suspensæ ad ventos," to purify themselves; as th sails of a ship spread out to dry. The Huron Indian pray to the souls of the fish they catch; well, why shoul they not? a fish has a soul if Modern Society has one one could conceive a fish going softly through shinin waters forever and forever in the ecstasy of motion; bu who could conceive Modern Society in the spheres?

Wandering thus from her drawing-room furniture t problems of eternity, and only succeeding in making her self unsettled and uncomfortable, the Lady Hilda, ou of tune with everything, put off her cashmere dressing gown, had herself wrapped in her sables, and though she would go out;—it was just twelve o'clock.

Looking out of the window she saw a lady all sable like herself, going also out of the hôtel to a coupé, th image of her own.

"Who is that?" she asked of her favourite maid.

"That is Mlle. Léa, Miladi," said the maid. "She ame last night. She has the suite above."

"How dare you mention her!" said the Lady Hilda. The little accident filled up the measure of her dis-ust. Mlle. Jénny Léa was a young lady who had educed the affections of an Emperor, three archdukes, nd an untold number of the nobility of all nations; she as utterly uneducated, inconceivably coarse, and had rst emerged from a small drinking shop in the dens of Whitechapel; she was the rage of the moment, having ot a needy literary hack to write her autobiography, hich she published in her own name, as "Aventures 'une Anglaise"; the book had no decency, and as little it, but it professed to show up the scandals of a great ourt, and it made some great men ridiculous and worse, eighty thousand copies of it had been sold over Europe, nd great ladies leaned from their carriages eager to see Ille. Jenny Léa pass by them.

Mlle. Jenny Léa, indeed, having put the finishing roke to her popularity by immense debts and a forced le of her effects in Paris, was the sensation of the our, only sharing public attention with the Père ilarion, a young and passionately earnest Dominican, ho was making a crusade against the world, in a noble nd entirely vain fervour, from the pulpits of all the reatest churches on the Continent. It was "the thing" go and hear Père Hilarion, weep with him and pray ith him, and then coming out of the church doors to ad Jenny Léa and talk of her. It is by these admirable ixtures that Society manages to keep itself alive.

The Père Hilarion was breaking his great heart over e vileness and the hopelessness of it all, as any one who

has any soul in him must be disposed to do. But to Society the Père Hilarion was only a sort of mental liqueur as Jenny Léa was an American "pick-me-up":—that was all. Society took them indifferently, one after the other. Of the two, of course it preferred Jenny Léa.

The Lady Hilda in supreme disgust went out in her sables, as Mlle. Jenny Léa in hers drove from the door.

"What good things sumptuary laws must have been," she thought. "If such creatures had to dress all in yellow now, as I think they had once (or was it Jews?) who would talk of them, who would look at them, who would lose money about them? Not a soul. And to think that there have been eighty thousand people who have bought her book!"

"Has anything offended you, Madame? Who or what is so unhappy?" said the voice of Della Rocca, as she crossed the pavement of the court between the lines of bowing hôtel functionaries, who had bent their spines double in just the same way to Mlle. Léa three minutes previously.

"Nothing in especial," she answered him, coldly. "Those baccarat people kept me awake half the night. I wish the gendarmes *had* interfered. What wretched weather it is!"

"It is a little cold; but it is very bright," said Della Rocca, in some surprise, for the day, indeed, was magnificent and seasonable. "I was coming in the hope that I might be admitted, though I know it is too early, and not your day, and everything that it ought not to be. But I was so unfortunate last night; you were so monopolized——"

She deigned to smile a little, but she continued to move to her brougham.

"Your climate is the very Harpagon of climates. I have not seen one warm day yet. I am thinking of returning to Paris."

He grew very pale.

"Is not that very sudden?" he asked her; there was a great change in his voice.

"Oh, no; I have my house there, as you know, and Monsieur Odissôt is painting the ballroom in frescoes. I have quite a new idea for my drawing-rooms, too; after all, furnishing is one of the fine arts; do you like that young Odissôt's talent? His drawing is perfection; he was a pupil of Hippolyte Flandrin. Good morning."

She was in her coupé by this time, and he was obliged to close the door on her; but he kept his hand upon it.

"Since you are leaving us so soon and so cruelly, Madame, would you honour my own old chapel frescoes as you promised?—they might give you some ideas for your ballroom."

Lady Hilda deigned to smile fairly and fully this time.

"Is that a satire or a profanity—or both together?"

"It is jealousy of Camille Odissôt! I will go to Paris and paint your frescoes, Madame, if you will let me; I can paint in fresco and in tempera; I was a student in the Academy of San Luca in my time."

His words were light, and his manner also, but his eyes had a language that made the Lady Hilda colour a little and look out of the other window of her coupé.

"I must first call upon Olga; I have promised," she answered, irrelevantly. "But I will join you at your

palace in an hour; perhaps she will come with me; I should not like to leave, certainly, without having seen your chapel. Au revoir."

"If you do leave, Madame, I follow!—to paint the ballroom."

He shut the carriage-door, and stood bareheaded in the wintry wind as the impatient horses dashed away. When it had disappeared he put his hat on, lighted a cigar, and strolled to his own house.

"She will not go to Paris," he said to himself.

He knew women well.

In an hour and a half she arrived at his own gates, bringing the Princess Olga with her.

She saw the grand old garden, the mighty staircases, the courts that once held troops of armed men; she saw his own rooms, with their tapestries that Flemish John Rosts had had the doing of so many centuries before; she saw the exquisite dim silent chapel, whose walls, painted by the Memmi in one portion and continued by Masaccio, were amongst the famous things of the city. She was moved and saddened; softened too; after all, the decay of a great race has an unutterable pathos; it will touch even a vulgar mind; she, arrogant and fastidious as to birth, as though she had been born before the '89, was touched by it to the core.

She had heard, too, of how he lived; without debt, yet with dignity, with the utmost simplicity and without reproach; there was something in his fortunes which seemed to her worthier than all distinction and success, something that stirred that more poetic side of her nature, which the world had never allowed to awake, but which had been born with her nevertheless. She

was serious and dreaming as she lingered in the beautiful old chapel, under whose mosaic pavement there lay the dust of so many generations of his race. He noticed her silence and thought to himself:

"Perhaps she is thinking how base it is in a man as poor as I to seek a woman so rich as herself";—but she was not thinking that at all as she swept on in her sables, with her delicate cheeks, fair as the lovely Niphétos rose, against the darkness of the fur.

That immortality which she had been doubting in the morning, did not seem so absurdly impossible here. There was religion in the place, a different one to what she had known kneeling at the *messe des paresseux* in the Madeleine; the sort of religion that a woman only becomes aware of when she loves.

She started and seemed to awake from a dream when Princess Olga suggested that it was time to go; Princess Olga was a person of innumerable engagements, who was always racing after half an hour without ever catching it, like the Minister-Duke of Newcastle, and like ninety-nine people out of every hundred in the nineteenth century. There was some bric-à-brac the Princess wanted somebody to cheapen for her; she bade him come and do it; he complied willingly enough. They went all three to that bric-à-brac shop, and thence to another, and yet another. Then Princess Olga, who was used to a more brilliant part than that of the "terza incommoda," left them to themselves over the faïence and marqueterie.

Lady Hilda, who, despite all her fashion, liked walking like every healthy woman, dismissed her horses and walked the length of the river-street, he with her. People meeting them began to make conjectures, and bets,

harder than ever; and Italian ladies, looking out of their carriage windows, wondered for the five-millionth time at the freedom of English women—as indeed Italian ladies have good cause to do in far more reprehensible liberties.

They walked down to the piazzone and back again. It was growing dusk. She went home to her hôtel, and let him enter with her, and had some tea by the firelight; all the while he made love to her with eyes and gesture and word, as only an Italian can, and she avoided explicit declaration of it, and direct need to reply to it, with all the consummate tact that ten years' practice in such positions had polished in her.

It was a charming pastime—were it nothing more. It was quite a pity when Madame Mila entered unsuspecting, and full of new wrongs in the matter of the *Muscadins* and fresh gossip concerning some forty people's marriages, divorces, debts, ignominies, and infamies. It is fortunate that there are so many wicked people in Society, for if there were not, what would the good people have to talk about? they would die of paralysis of the tongue.

"You will not leave us for Paris, yet?" he murmured as he rose, with a sigh, only heard by her ear.

She smiled, and balanced a Devoniensis tea-rose idly in her hands.

"Not just yet, if your weather prove better."

He drew the tea-rose away from her fingers unseen even by the quick marmoset eyes of little Madame Mila, who as it chanced was busied making herself a cup of tea. She let it go.

"You should have seen all the men looking after that

orrible Léa," said Madame Mila, drinking her com-
ound of cream and sugar, as the door closed on him.
They have eyes for nothing else, I do think; and only
ancy her having the very suite above mine—it is atro-
ious! They say the things at her sale fetched fabulous
ums. Little pomatum and rouge pots, five hundred
rancs each! They say she has fixed her mind on young
ant' Andrea here; I suppose she had heard he is enor-
nously rich. Oh, did you know Gwendolen Doncaster
as come? She has lost all her money at Monte Carlo,
nd she has dyed her hair a nice straw colour; she looks
fteen years younger, I do assure you. Don is shooting
n Dalmatia—of course she abuses him—poor old Don!
wonder how we should have got on if he had married
ie, as he wanted. Gwen told me Lord Derbyshire has
un off with Mrs. Wheelskaitte—what he *can* see in her!
nd those open scandals are so stupid, where is the use
f them? Surely you can do what you like without
alling all the world in to see you doing it. When a
oman has an easy husband she *never* need compromise
erself, and Wheelskaitte certainly always was that.
)h, you never would know them, I remember, because
ey were new people; she was an odious creature and
ery ugly, but they gave very good parties in London,
nd their cottage was as nice a one as you could go
) for Ascot. You used to like little Wroxeter, did not
ou? He was such a pretty boy—he has just left Eton,
nd he is wild to marry a girl out of a music-hall, so
Gwen says. Those creatures get all the good marriages
owadays:—and two hundred débutantes waiting to be
resented at the Drawing-room this month! Have you
een the new book 'Confessions d'un Feu Follet'? Mau-

rice has just brought it to me. It is rivalling Jenny Léa, and they say it is worse—quite unmentionable—everybody is talking about it. It was out last week, and they have sold five editions. The man called Bistrim in it is Bismarck. No; I don't know that it is witty. I don't think things are witty nowadays. It is horrible and *infecte*—but you can't put it down till you've done it. Old Lady Mauleverer is dying at the Pace hôtel here—of undigested scandal, Featherleigh says, but I believe it's gastritis—what a nasty old woman she has always been. I have just left a card with inquiries and regrets; I do hope she won't get better. I won ever so much at play last night. I forgot to tell you so: I bought that *rocaille* necklace on the Jewellers' Bridge; it was only six thousand francs, and it really did belong to the Comtesse d'Albany. It's very pretty too——"

So Madame Mila discoursed, greatly to her own satisfaction. She loved so much to hear her own tongue, that she always chose the stupidest and silliest of her lovers for her chief favours—a clever man had always ideas of his own, and was sure to want to express them sometime or another. All she desired were listeners and echoes. Discussion may be the salt of life to a few, but listeners and echoes are the bonbons and cigarettes that no woman can do without.

The Lady Hilda sitting looking into the fire, with her eyes nearly closed, murmured yes, and no, and indeed, in the proper places, and let her run on, hearing not one word. Those fingers which had entangled themselves so softly with her own withdrawing the tea-rose, had left a magnetic thrill upon her—a dreamy, lulling pleasure.

That evening the good Hubert received a second tele-

gram contradicting the first, which had announced his mistress's return, and putting off that return indefinitely. The good Hubert, who was driving her best horses, drinking her best wines, drawing large cheques for accounts never examined, and generally enjoying his winter, was much relieved, and hastened to communicate the happy change to Monsieur Camille Odissôt, whom the first telegram had also cast into great consternation; since that clever but idle young gentleman, having been prepaid half the sum agreed on for the fresco-painting, had been spending it joyously after the tastes of young artists, assisted by a pretty brown actress of the Folies Marigny, and had not at that moment even begun to touch the walls and the ceiling of the ballroom confided to his genius.

"But you had better begin, though she is not coming back," said the good Hubert, surveying the blank waste of prepared plaster. "Miladi is not often out of temper, but when she is, ouf! I would as soon serve a Russian. Better begin; paint your best, because she knows—Miladi knows, and she is hard to please in those things. Not but what I dare say, as soon as you have done it all, she will take it into her head that it looks too cold, or looks too warm, or will not compose well, or something or other, and will cover it all up with silk and satin. But that will not matter to you."

"Not at all," said Monsieur Camille, who, though he had been a pupil of Flandrin, had learned nothing of that true master's conscientiousness in art, but was a clever young man of a new generation, who drew beautifully, as mechanically as a tailor stitches beautifully, and was of the very wise opinion that money was everything.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Postiche ball came off, and was a brilliant success. Madame Mila announced the next morning when she got up that she had never enjoyed anything better—not even at the Tuileries.

"And the hostess?" said Lady Hilda.

"I didn't even see her, thank goodness," said Madame Mila, frankly. "I went late, you know, and she'd been standing at the door four hours, and had got tired, and had gone off duty into the crowd somewhere. Of course it wasn't my business to go and look for her."

"Of course not, but you brought off your cotillon things?"

"Yes. There they are," said Madame Mila, unconscious of any satire. "I never saw such *luxe*—no, not even in the dear old Emperor's time—the things everybody got must have cost hundreds of thousands of francs. Certainly little Dickie managed it beautifully. He ordered the whole affair, you know."

"Little Dickie, or anybody else, could float Medea herself in society if she would brew cotillon toys of a new sort in her cauldron," said the Lady Hilda.

"Medea?" said Madame Mila, who knew about her because she had seen Ristori so often. "Poor thing! it was that horrid Jason that deserved to be put out of society, only men never do get put out of it for anything they do; I don't know how it is—we cut no end of

women, but we never cut a man. Well, I assure you, my dear, the ball was charming—*charming,* though you do look so contemptuous. We had all our own people, and saw nobody else, all night. I don't think I need bow to the woman, do you? I'm not supposed to have seen her, though I do know her by sight, a little podgy sunburnt-looking fat creature with liveries for all the world like what the sheriffs have in England at assize time. No; I'm sure I needn't bow to her. I told Dickie beforehand I shouldn't."

"No doubt Dickie was delighted to have you on any terms."

"Of course; and I'll send a card today," said Madame Mila, with the magnanimous air of one who does a very noble thing.

From that time thenceforward she would forget the Joshua R. Postiches and everything concerning them as absolutely as if she had never heard anything about them; the woman's second ball, if she gave one, would be nothing new, and no sort of fun whatever.

"You're always at me about Maurice," she said, pursuing her own ideas, "Look at Olga with Carlo Maremma!—she did make him go last night, and he was the only Italian there. You talk of Maurice—Olga is twice as careless as I am——"

"Olga is my friend; don't discuss her, please."

"Oh, that's very fine!—when you are always finding fault with me about Maurice!"

"I should not let any third person blame you."

"You are very strange, Hilda," said Madame Mila, eyeing her with a curious wonder, and ruffling herself up in her embroidered pink cashmere dressing-gown, as

if she were a little bird in the heart of a big rose. "Why should you defend people behind their back? Nobody ever does. We all say horrible things of one another; but we don't mean half of them, so what does it matter? I don't blame Olga, not in the least; Schouvaloff is a brute, and, besides, he knows it very well, and he doesn't mind it a bit; indeed, of course he's glad enough——"

"I do blame Olga; but I can't see how *you* can," said her cousin, coldly.

Madame Mila ruffled herself more, looking more and more like a little angry bird in the middle of a pink rose.

"I? Pray what *can* anybody say of me? Spiridion is always with me half the year at least. Spiridion is extremely fond of Maurice, so are all the children. He's at another hôtel, right at the other end of the place; really I can't see why I must rush out of a town because a friend happens to come into it also——"

"My dear Mila, pray don't talk that nonsense to me," said her cousin, serenely. "I dare say ten years hence you will marry your little Lili to M. des Gommeux; people do do that sort of thing, though they find fault with the plots of the old Greek plays. I suppose it 'saves society'; at least, it saves appearances. Olga is imprudent, I know, and wrong; but, at least, she has the courage of her opinions; she does not talk all that pusillanimous prurient absurdity about 'friendship.'"

"Nobody can understand you, Hilda; and I don't know what you mean about Greek plays," muttered Madame Mila. "Everybody lives in the same way: you

talk as if it were only *me!* Spiridion never says a word to me; what business have you?"

"None in the least, dear; only you will bring up the subject—Qui s'excuse s'accuse. That is all. You are not coming out this morning? Au revoir then; I am going to see a newly-found San Cipriano il Mago outside the gates; they think it is by Il Moretto. The face and dress are Venetian, they say; but you care nothing about all that, do you?"

"Nothing," said Madame Mila, with a yawn. "I suppose if it take your fancy you'll be buying the whole church with it in, if you can't get it any other way. I wish I'd your money, I wouldn't waste it on old pictures, that only make a room dark; and the kind of light *they* want is horribly unbecoming to people."

"I promise you I shall not hang an altar-piece in a room," said the Lady Hilda. "I leave that for the heretics and the bourgeoisie. Good-bye, my dear."

"Who's going with you?" cried Madame Mila after her: Lady Hilda hesitated a moment.

"Nina is, and the French artist who has discovered the Moretto, and—M. della Rocca."

Madame Mila laughed, and took up a little mirror to see if all the colour on her face were quite right. One horrible never-to-be-forgotten day—one eyebrow had been higher than the other.

Lady Hilda, descending the hôtel staircase, met the faithful Maurice ascending. That slender and indefatigable leader of cotillons swept his hat to the ground, twisted the waxed ends of his small moustache, and murmured that he was about to inquire of the servants if

Madame la Comtesse were "tout-à-fait remise après ses fatigues incroyables."

Lady Hilda, whom he feared very greatly, passed him with a chilly salutation, and he went on up the stairs, and in two minutes' time was assuring Madame Mila that she was "fraîche comme la rosée du matin," which did credit to his ready chivalry of compliments, since he was aware of all the mysteries of those bright cheeks and that small pomegranate-like mouth, and had even once or twice before great balls, given an artistic touch or two to their completion, having graduated with much skill and success in such accomplishments under the tuition of Mademoiselle Rose Thè, and La Petite Boulotte.

The San Cipriano was to be found in a church some five miles out of the city; a lonely church set high on a fragrant hillside, with sheep amongst the olive boughs, and the ox-plough under the vines that were about it, and high hedges of wild roses and thickets of arbutus rambling around its old walled graveyard.

The paths close round it were too steep for the horses, and the last half mile had to be climbed on foot.

It was one of those spring days which often fall in February; the ground was blue with violets, and the grass golden with crocus and hepatica; there were butterflies and bees on the air; the mavis and blackbird were singing.

The San Cipriano hung over a side altar in the dark, desolate, grand old church, where no worshipper ever came except a tired peasant, or a shepherd sheltering from a storm.

Della Rocca pulled aside the moth-eaten curtains from the adjacent window, and let the sunshine in. Some lit-

tle children were sitting on the altar-steps stringing daisies and berries; the light made a halo about their heads; the deep Venetian colours of the forgotten picture glanced like jewels through the film of the dust of ages. Its theme was the martyrdom of the Magician and of S. Justina; beneath were the crowds of Nicomedia and the guards of Diocletian, above were the heavens opened and the hosts of waiting angels. It was a great theme greatly treated by the great Brescian who, although the pupil of Titian and the rival of Veronese, is so little known, save in the cities that lie betwixt the Dolomites and the Apennines.

"It is one of the most beautiful legends that we have, to my thinking," said Della Rocca, when they had studied it minutely and in all lights. "It has been very seldom selected by painters for treatment; one wonders why; perhaps because there is too much human passion in it for a sacred subject."

"Yes," said Lady Hilda, dreamily. "One can never divest oneself of the idea that S. Justina loved him with an earthly love."

"Oh, Hilda! how pagan of you," said the Marchesa del Trasimene, a little aghast.

"Not at all. Why should we doubt it?" said Della Rocca, quickly. "Why should we deny that a pure love would have power against the powers of the world?"

Lady Hilda looked at him, and a great softness came into her face; then she stooped to the little children playing with the berries on the altar-steps, and put some money in their little brown hands.

"It is a very fine picture," she said, after a moment's pause. "I do not think I have ever seen brown and

gold and crimson so beautifully managed, and fused in so deep a glow of colour save in Palma Vecchio's S. Barbara—you remember—in S. Maria Formosa in Venice?"

"The portrait of Violante Palma—yes. But this subject has a deeper and warmer interest. S. Barbara with her tower and her cannon is too strong to touch one very much. One cannot think that she ever suffered."

"Yet S. Barbara has a very wide popularity, if one may use the word to a saint."

"All symbols of strength have; the people are weak; they love what will help them. It is very singular what deep root and vast fame one saint has, and how obscure remains another; yet both equal in holiness and life, and courage of death. Perhaps the old painters have done it by the frequency of their choice of certain themes."

"Oh, no," said Lady Hilda; "be sure the painters rather followed the public preference than directed it. Poets lead; painters only mirror. I like this San Cipriano very much. They did not say too much of it. It is left to dust and damp. Could I buy it, do you think?"

"I dare say,—I will inquire for you tomorrow. We sell anything now. When the public debt is a little heavier, and the salt tax is protested against, we shall sell the Transfiguration—why not?—we have a copy at S. Peter's. Indeed, why keep the S. Cecilia doing nothing in a dark old city like Bologna, when its sale with a few others might make a minister or a senator well off for life?"

"Do not be so bitter, Paolo," said the Marchesa Nina, "you might have been a minister yourself."

"And rebuilt Palestrina out of my commission on the tax on cabbages! Yes, I have lost my opportunities."

The Lady Hilda was gazing at the clouds of angels in the picture, who bore aloft the martyred souls in their immortal union; and from them she glanced at the little fair wondering faces of the peasant children. She had never thought about children ever in any way, save as little figures that composed well in Stothard's drawings, in Sir Joshua's pictures, in Correggio's frescoes. Now, for a second, the thought glanced through her that women were happy who had those tender soft ties with the future of the world. What future had she?—You cannot make a future out of diamonds, china, and M. Worth.

"You really wish to buy the San Cipriano?" he asked her, as they passed over the worn, damp pavement towards the sunlight of the open door.

"Yes—you seem to think it sacrilege?"

"No; I think the moral decadence of feeling which makes it possible for my nation to sell such things is a sacrilege against our past, and a violation of the rights of our posterity;—but that is another matter, and no fault of yours. What will you do with it when you have it?"

"I will put it in my oratory in Paris."

The answer jarred on him; yet there was no other which he could have expected.

"How naturally you think of buying all you see!" he said, a little impatiently. "I suppose that power of acquisition—that wand of possession—is very dear to you."

"What do you mean? I do not know—it is a habit. Yes; I suppose one likes it."

"No doubt. Your riches are to you as his magic was to San Cipriano yonder: the willingest of slaves."

"What!—an evil spirit then?"

"Not necessarily. But——"

"But what?"

"A despot, though a slave. One who holds your soul; as the powers of darkness held his, until a great and spiritual love set him free."

They were passing out of the open doorway into the calm golden light of the passing day. Through the fine tracery of the olive-boughs the beautiful valley shone like a summer sea. Before them, above the southern mountains, the sun was going down. Her eyes grew dim for a moment as she looked. His hand had closed on hers; she let it lie within his clasp; it was the first gesture of tenderness she had ever allowed to him. Then at a sudden recollection she withdrew it, and she smiled with her old serene indifference.

"You *will* talk to me in unknown tongues! S. Justina was a holy woman; I am not. I am not sure that I ever did any unselfish thing in all my life. How many violets there are;—gather me some."

The others drew near; he left her and gathered the violets. They were countless; the old church was left alone to perish; no foot of priest or worshipper now ever trod upon their purple glories.

She leaned over the low wall of the graveyard, and watched the setting sun. She felt that her eyes were full of tears.

"If I had met him earlier——" she thought.

They walked down through the olive thickets, along the grassy slopes of the hill, to the carriage, and drove home in the now waning light.

She was capricious, contemptuous, ironical, arrogant, in everything she said, lying back with the furs covering her from the chill evening winds.

"Does going to a church always make you so caustic, cara mia?" said the Marchesa Nina.

Della Rocca was very silent. The French artist kept up the ball of talk with her and the lovely Marchesa, and played the gay game well. The sun sank quite; the brief twilight came; then darkness; the horses took them down through the walled lanes and the rose hedges into the narrow streets, where here and there the lamps were twinkling, and the glow of the wood fires shone through the grated casements.

The carriage paused first at the Hôtel Murat.

"I shall see you tonight at Princess Fürstenberg's, Hilda, of course?" said the Marchesa.

"Oh, yes," said the Lady Hilda as she descended, drawing her sables closer around her. "You will be there, I suppose?" she added, with a little change of her voice, to Della Rocca, as he held his arm for her to alight. He looked straight down into her eyes.

"I think not," he said, simply. "Good night, Madame."

He stood with his head uncovered, whilst she went up the steps of the hotel; then, as the door closed on her, he walked away to his own old house.

Lady Hilda went up to her own rooms; she had a knot of violets with her. Before she put them in water

she touched them with her lips—as any girl of sixteen or any peasant Gretchen might have done.

That night at the Princess Fürstenberg's—one of the pleasantest houses of the winter city—men and women both said to one another that they had never seen her looking more beautiful, or more magnificent in the blaze of her jewels, but they found her colder, and more difficult to converse with than ever, and were more than ever hopelessly impressed with the sense of their own absolute nullity in her eyes.

He was not there.

She stayed but a brief time; long enough to chill every one there like ice, which was the effect she always produced in society, when it was so unhappy as not to please her; then, having frozen it, she left it,—the ladies who remained breathing freer when her delicate loveliness and her mighty emeralds had ceased to outshine them. She sank back in her carriage with a great sigh.

The homeward streets led past the palace of the Della Rocca. She let the window down, and looked outward as she passed it. She saw a single casement alone lighted in the great black mass of frowning stone, with its machicolated walls and iron stanchions. It was above the entrance; she knew it was his favourite room; where his books were, and his old bronzes, and his favourite weapons.

Her eyes filled with tears again as she looked up at the solitary light. She felt for the little cluster of violets that she had fastened under the great emeralds in her bosom,—his hand had gathered them.

"If any one had told me I would care!" she thought to herself.

The tears on her lashes stole slowly down, and dimmed the emeralds and refreshed the violets.

She was the most heartless creature in the world; the coldest and most self-engrossed of women, her friends and acquaintances were saying after her departure, in the drawing-rooms of the Princess Fürstenberg; not like her cousin; dear little Madame Mila was all good nature, all kindliness, all heart.

At the Fiera for the orphan children the week before had not dear little Madame Mila slaved herself to death; bustling about in the most bewitching costume; whirling like a little Japanese windmill; wearing the loveliest little muslin apron, with huge pockets, into which thousands of francs were poured; turning the lottery-wheel indefatigably for three days, and selling cigars she had lighted, and lilies of the valley she had kissed, at the most fabulous prices for the good of the poor? And had not Lady Hilda contemptuously refused to have anything to do with the Fiera at all?

The almoner of the charities, indeed, had received a fifty-thousand-franc note anonymously. But then, how could anybody divine that the Lady Hilda had sent it because a chance word of Della Rocca's had sunk into her mind? Whereas everybody saw Madame Mila whirling, and saying so prettily, "Pour nos pauvres!—pour nos chers pauvres!"

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning they brought her a note; it said that he had inquired about the San Cipriano, but the matter had to be referred to some authority absent in Rome, and there could be no answer for a few days, perhaps weeks; the note was signed with the assurance of the highest consideration of the humblest of her servants,—Paolo della Rocca.

The note might have been read from the housetop: she had had letters from him of a different strain; charming little brief letters, about a flower, about an opera-box, about a piece of pottery, always about some trifle, but making the trifle the medium of a delicately-veiled homage, and a softly-hinted tenderness.

She tossed the note into the fire, and saw his name burn in the clear flame of a pine branch: why could he not have called instead of writing?

She was restless all day, and nothing pleased her:—not even M. de St. Louis, who did call and sat a long time, and was in his most delightful humour, and full of new anecdotes about everybody and everything:—but he did not mention Della Rocca.

The Duc found no topic that suited her. It was the Corso di Gala that afternoon, would she not go?

No: her horses hated masks, and she hated noise.

The Veglione on Sunday—would she not go to that?

No: those things were well enough in the days of

Philippe d'Orléans, who invented them, but they were now only as stupid as they were vulgar; anybody was let in for five francs.

Did she like the new weekly journal, that was electrifying Paris?

No: she could see nothing in it: there was no wit nowadays—only personalities, which grew more gross every year.

The Duc urged that personalities were as old as Cratinus and Archilochus, and that five hundred years before Christ the satires of Hipponax drove Bupalus to hang himself.

She answered that a bad thing was not the better for being old.

People were talking of a clever English novel translated everywhere, called "In a Hothouse," the hothouse being society—had she seen it?

No: what was the use of reading novels of society by people who never had been in it? The last English "society" novel she had read had described a cabinet minister in London as going to a Drawing-room in the crowd, with everybody else, instead of by the *petite entrée;* they were always full of such blunders.

Had she read the new French story "Le Bal de Mademoiselle Bibi"?

No: she had heard too much of it; it made you almost wish for a Censorship of the Press.

The Duc agreed that literature was terribly but truly described as "un tas d'ordures soigneusement enveloppé."

She said that the "tas d'ordures" without the envelope was sufficient for popularity, but that the literature of any age was not to be blamed—it was only a natural

growth, like a mushroom; if the soil were noxious, the fungus was bad.

The Duc wondered what a censorship would let pass if there were one.

She said that when there was one it had let pass Crébillon, the Chevalier Le Clos, and the "Bijoux Indiscrets"; it had proscribed Marmontel, Helvetius, and Lanjuinais. She did not know how one man could be expected to be wiser than all his generation.

The Duc had admired some majolica she had purchased.

She said she began to think that majolica was a false taste; the metallic lustre was fine, but how clumsy the forms; one might be led astray by too great love of old work.

The Duc praised a magnificent Sèvres panel, just painted by Riocreux and Goupil, and given to her by Princess Olga on the New Year.

She said it was well done, but what charm was there in it? All their modern iron and zinc colours, and hydrate of aluminum, and oxide of chromium, and purple of Cassius, and all the rest of it, never gave one-tenth the charm of those old painters who had only green greys and dull blues and tawny yellows, and never could get any kind of red whatever; Olga had meant to please her, but she, for her part, would much sooner have had a little panel of Abruzzi, with all the holes and defects in the pottery, and a brown contadina for a Madonna; there was some interest in that,—there was no interest in that gorgeous landscape and those brilliant hunting figures.

The Duc bore all the contradictions with imperturbable serenity and urbanity, smiled to himself, and bowed himself out in perfect good humour.

"Tout va bien," he thought to himself; "Miladi must be very much in love to be so cross."

The Duc's personal experience amongst ladies had made him of opinion that love did not improve the temper.

"The carriage waits, Miladi," said her servant.

"I shall not drive today," said Lady Hilda. "Tell them to saddle Saïd."

It was a brilliant day; all the bells were pealing; and the sunshine and the soft wind streaming in. She thought a ten-mile stretch across the open country might do her good; at any rate, it would be better than sitting at home, or pacing slowly in the procession of the Corso di Gala, which was only a shade less stupid than the pelting Corso.

Saïd was a swift, nervous, impetuous horse; the only sort of horse she cared to ride; and he soon bore her beyond the gates, leaving the carriages of her friends to crush each other in the twisting streets, and vie in state liveries and plumes and ribbons and powdered servants, and amuse the good-natured, kindly, orderly crowds of Floralia, clustered on the steps of churches and under the walls of palaces.

She rode against the wind, as straight as the state of the roads would permit her, as wonderful a sight to the astonished country people as though she had been S. Margarita on her dragon. Saïd took a few stone walls and sunken fences, which put him on good terms with

himself. She was in no mood to spare him, or avoid any risks it might amuse him to run; and they had soon covered many more miles than she knew.

"Where are we?" she asked her groom, when Saïd slackened his pace at last.

The groom, who was a Scotchman, had no idea and no power of asking.

"It does not matter," said his mistress, and rode on again.

They were on a tolerably broad road, with a village above them, on a steep green vine-clad hill; there were the usual olive orchards everywhere, with great almond trees full of blossom and white as driven snow, and farther still all around the countless curves of the many mountain spurs that girdle the valley of Floralia. There was another stone wall in front of them; beyond it the turf looked fresh and pleasant; she put Saïd at it, but some one from a distance called out to her in Italian, "For God's sake stop the horse!"

On the other side of the wall the ground fell suddenly to a depth of twenty feet.

She caught up Saïd's head in time only by a moment; he stood erect on his hind legs a second but she kept her seat unshaken; she thought he would lose his balance and fall back on her; but she stilled and controlled him with the coolest nerve. As he descended on his front feet, Della Rocca came through a high iron gate on the left, leapt a ditch, and sprang to the horse's head.

"How can you do such mad things?" he said, with a quiver in his voice. "That gate was locked; I could only shout to you. I thought I was too late——"

His face was pale as death; her colour had not even changed. She looked at him and smiled a little.

"So many thanks—it is a silly habit taking walls; I learned to like it when I was a child, and rode with my brother. Saïd is not frightened now; you may let him alone. Where are we?"

"On the ground of Palestrina."

"Palestrina! I see nothing of your villa."

"We are eight miles from the villa. It lies beyond those other hills—but all the ground here is mine. I was visiting one of my farms. By Heaven's mercy I saw you——"

His voice still faltered, and his face was pale with strong emotion; his hand had closed on hers, and rested on her knee.

"You were behind that tall gate then?"

"Yes; I have the key of that gate, but the lock was rusted. Come and rest a moment, you are a long way from Floralia. There is an old farmhouse here; they are all my own people."

She dismounted and threw the bridle to her groom.

"It terrifies you more than it did me," she said, with a little laugh.

He took both her hands and kissed them; he did not answer, neither did she rebuke him.

He led her through the iron gate down a grassy path between the grey gnarled olive trees and the maples with their lithe red boughs; there was a large old house with clouds of pigeons round it, and great mulberry trees near, and sculptured shields and lions on the walls; women ran to him delightedly, men left their ploughs

afar off and came, eager and bareheaded, to see if there was any chance to serve him; he was their prince, their lord, their idol, their best friend; as their fathers had followed his to the death, so would they have followed him. Half a dozen flew to do each word of his bidding; brought in the horse, brought out an oaken settle for her in the sun, brought fresh water from the spring, fresh lemons from the tree, fresh violets from the hedges. At a sign from him one of the shepherd-boys, who was famous for his singing, came and stood before them, and sang to his guitar some of the love-songs of the province in a sweet tenor voice, liquid as the singing of nightingales. The green and gracious country was around, the low sun made the skies of the west radiant, the smell of the woods and fields rose fresh from the earth. She drank the draught he made for her, and listened to the singing and watched the simple pastoral, old-world life around her, and felt her heart thrill as she met the amorous worship of his eyes.

She had never thought of natural beauty, or of the lives of the poor, save now and then when they had been recalled to her by some silvery landscape of Corot, or some sad rural idyl of Millet; as she sat here, she felt as if she had passed all her life in some gorgeous heated theatre, and had only now come out into the open air and under the arch of heaven.

There was a wonderful dreamy, lulling charm in this olive-hidden solitude; she did not care to move, to think, to analyze. He did not speak to her of love; they both avoided words, which, spoken, might break the spell of their present peace and part them; but every now and then his eyes looked into hers, and were heavy with the

languor of silent passion, and stirred her heart to strange sweet tumult.

When the boy sang the passionate, plaintive love-songs, then her face grew warm, and her eyelids fell—it was no longer an unknown tongue to her.

She would not think of the future—she resigned herself to the charm of the hour.

So also did he.

The night before he had resolved to avoid her, to cease to see her, to forget her. She had wounded him, and he had told himself that it was best to let the world have her, body and soul. Now chance had overruled his resolve: he could not war with his fate—he let it come as it might. He had found his way to influence her; he knew that he could move her as no other could; yet he hesitated to say to her what must unite them or part them.

Besides, since this woman had grown dear to him with a passion born alike out of her physical beauty and his own sense of power on her, and his insight into the richer possibilities of her nature, the colder calculations which had occupied him at his first knowledge of her seemed to him base and unworthy; if he had not loved her he would have pursued her with no pang of conscience; having grown to love her, to love her loveliness, and her pride, and her variableness, and her infinite charm, and her arrogant faults, to love *her* in a word, and to desire indescribably to lead her from the rank miasma of the pleasures and pomps of the world into a clearer and higher spiritual atmosphere, he recoiled more and more, day by day, from seeking her as the medium of his own fortune, he checked himself more and more

in the utterance of a passion which could but seem to her mingled at the least with the lowest of motives.

He was her lover, he did not disguise it from himself or her; but he paused before doing that which would make him win or lose it all; not because he feared his fate, but because he could not bring himself to the acceptance of it.

"Sing me something yourself," she said to him; and he took the boy's mandolin and, leaning against the porch of the house, touched a chord of it now and then, and sang her everything she would, while the sun shone in the silver of the olives and the afternoon shadows stole slowly down the side of the mountains. Then he sat on the steps at her feet, and talked to her of his people, of his land, of his boyhood and his youth.

"I have lived very much in the great world," he said, after a time. "This world which you think is the only one. But I am never so well content as when I come back here under my olives. I suppose you cannot understand that?"

"I am not sure—yes, perhaps. One grows tired of everything," she answered with a little sigh.

"Everything that is artificial, you mean. People think Horace's love of the rural life an affectation. I believe it to be most sincere. After the strain of the conventionality and the adulation of the Augustan Court, the natural existence of the country must have been welcome to him. I know it is the fashion to say that a love of Nature belongs only to the Moderns, but I do not think so. Into Pindar, Theocritus, Meleager, the passion for Nature must have entered very strongly; what *is* modern is the more subjective, the more fanciful, feeling which

makes Nature a sounding-board to echo all the cries of man."

"But that is always a northern feeling?"

"Inevitably. With us Nature is too *riante* for us to grow morbid about it. The sunshine that laughs around us nine months of every year, the fruits that grow almost without culture, the flowers that we throw to the oxen to eat, the very stones that are sweet with myrtle, the very sea sand that is musical with bees in the rosemary, everything we grow up amongst from infancy makes our love of Nature only a kind of unconscious joy in it—but here even the peasant has that, and the songs of the men that cannot read or write are full of it. If a field labourer sing to his love he will sing of the narcissus and the crocus, as Meleager sang to Heliodora twenty centuries ago——"

"And your wild narcissus is the true narcissus; the Greek narcissus, with its many bells to one stem?"

"Yes. In March and April it will be out everywhere in the fields and woods about here. I thought once that you loved flowers as you loved art, merely as a decoration of your salon. But I was wrong. They are closer to your heart than that. Why do you deny your emotions? Why do you mask yourself under such cold phrases as those you used to me yesterday?"

She smiled a little.

"How should I remember what I said so long back as yesterday?"

"That is hard!—for those who hear may remember for a lifetime. Your words kept me from where you were last night."

"What I say at any time is worth but little thought.

I fear you think too well of me always," she said, on a sudden vague impulse and the first pang of humility that she had ever allowed to smite the superb vanity that had always enwrapped her.

With a soft grace of action he touched with his lips the hem of her riding skirt.

"No," he said simply, "you might indeed 'daze one to blindness like the noonday sun.' But I am not blind. I see in you many errors, more against yourself than others; I see the discontent which always argues high unsatisfied desire, and the caprice which is merely the offshoot of too long indulgence of all passing fancies; but what matter these?—your nature and the nobility of it lie underneath them in a vein of gold unworked. You have had the language of flattery to nausea: I do not give it you; I say but what I believe."

The tears sprang into her eyes, and the music of his voice thrilled through her.

She did not care to wait for the words that she knew would follow as his fingers stole and clasped hers close and she felt on her the gaze she did not dare to meet. She rose, and glanced to the west.

"The sun is just gone behind the hills. I shall be late. Will you tell them to bring me Saïd?"

He rose, too, and did not oppose her departure.

"I rode here myself, fortunately," he said. "You must allow me to go with you into Floralia; the roads are bad and hard to find."

They brought Saïd out of the great wooden sweet-smelling outhouse, and he raised her in silence to her saddle. He gave her a little knot of the fragrant leaf-less calycanthus with a few sprays of myrtle; she put

in her bosom; it was already dusk, and he saw the softened dimness of her eyes.

They rode down together in the declining light through the winding ways of the outlying country into the town; it was quite dark when they reached the gates; they had ridden fast and spoken scarcely at all.

As he lifted her from Saïd in the gloom within the scarcely lighted street, he pressed her softly for one second in his arms, so that she felt the beating of his heart.

"A rive derci!" he murmured.

She left him in silence, and without rebuke.

"Is that you, Duca?" said the voice of Madame Mila in the darkness, as a carriage, gorgeous with amber and gold liveries and with Carnival camellias at the horses' heads, pulled up with great noise and haste before the hotel door.

"Is that you, Duca? I am so glad; I wanted to speak to you. The Corso was horridly stupid. I don't care a bit except for the pelting days, do you? I sprained my arm last year in Rome with the pelting, and I really blinded poor Salvareo for a week. Why, dear me, that's Saïd! Have you and Hilda been riding together?"

"I met your cousin, Madame, by chance; she had lost her way. It is very easy to do so amongst our hills."

"How very fortunate that you met her!" said Madame Mila, with a little saucy laugh. "She will kill herself riding that horrid Saïd some day—perhaps she will listen to you if you tell her not. What was it I wanted to say,—oh, I want a very good box for the Veglione. You are one of the directors of the opera, are you not?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Well, mind I have one; big enoug to hold the supper table comfortably; and see Mauric about it, and dine with me tomorrow, will you? Nin and Olga and the usual people. Dear me, how thes horses do fidget. How very nice that you should hav met dear Hilda just when she'd lost her way! Good bye; but, of course, you'll be at the Roubleskoffs' tc night? I wish it wasn't costume. I'm England, an I'm embroidered all over with Union Jacks; and I hav a little Khedive on a gold stick that keeps tumbling u and down; and I carry a ship in full sail on the top c my head. I assure you it's very trying to be a Nava Power. How ever I shall be able to waltz with tha ship——"

Della Rocca rode away in the darkness, as the skir of Madame Mila vanished in the hotel doorway wit the gleam of the golden-pheasant trimmings shining unde the gas lamp.

He went home to his solitary dinner, and scarcel touched it, and barely even noticed his dog. He sa alone a long time, thinking, in the same room wher four months before, he had pondered on the Duc de S Louis's counsels, and had decided to himself that th woman, beautiful though she was, was arrogant, unin pressionable, extravagantly capricious, and in every wa antagonistic to him.

Now, he was passionately in love with her himsel he knew that she was deeply moved by him; he believe that he had only to ask and have; and yet he hesitated

It was the marriage of all other marriages for hin he had softened and subdued her in a manner whi could not but intoxicate his vanity, though he had le

vanity than most men; he did not distrust her character, because he believed that there was a vague lofty nobility in it, and a latent, though untouched, tenderness; of her caprices, of her changefulness, of her moods of contempt and of impatience, he had no fear; he would substitute other emotions for them. And yet he hesitated; he was unresolved; he was doubtful whether to accept the empire he had obtained.

He would have concluded a marriage of interest as coldly and tranquilly as any other man with a woman to whom he was indifferent. But with this woman whose mere touch thrilled him to the heart, and whose imperious eyes had only grown gentle for his sake!—never had he felt his poverty so painfully as in this moment when supreme Fortune seemed to have smiled upon him.

Though he loved her with passion, he almost wished that he had never seen her face.

After all, though generous, she was arrogant;—sooner or later she might make him feel that the golden sceptre was hers and not his. To his temper, which, although gentle, was deeply ingrained with the pride which had been transmitted to him from many generations of a feudal nobility, such a possibility seemed unendurable. He sat still lost in thought till his lamp grew low, and the wind rising loud, shook the leaded panes of the old high windows.

"I suppose when Fortune does smile at us, we always quarrel with her so," he thought, with some impatience of his own irresolution.

After all, what other man in Europe would not have been content?

He got up, caressed the dog, turned the lamp higher, and went into his bed-chamber.

"Get out the white mousquetaire dress," he said to his old servant. "I will go to the Roubleskoff ball."

All patrician Floralia was at the Roubleskoff ball, one of the last great entertainments of the expiring Carnival. In six more days there would come the Day of Ashes; and Floralia would repent her sins in sadness—that is, with only musical parties, a dinner here and there, and no suppers at all (perhaps a ball might be squeezed in once or twice by grace of the Russian Calendar, but, then, if you took advantage of that you were *brouillé* with all the *codini* at once).

He reached the Roubleskoff villa late, not so late but what he was in time to see the arrival of the woman who had sat with him at her feet, and talked with him of Meleager and the white narcissus flowers.

Lady Hilda entered like a sovereign, and drew all eyes on herself.

She was attired as Vittoria Colonna, and carried her purples and cloth of gold with more than royal grace; the colour on her cheek was heightened, her eyes had a dewy brilliancy; what they spoke to her she seemed hardly to hear.

He was as her shadow all the evening.

They were both feverishly happy; both curiously troubled. Neither cared to look onward.

Society there assembled said that it was a great thing for the Duca della Rocca; and wondered whether they would live most in Floralia or Paris.

"C'est moi qui a inspiré cela," said the Duc de St. Louis, with much self-complacency, sitting down to the

whist table; he was quite sure that all was right; he had seen the look in the eyes of both of them.

"She will compromise herself at last. Oh, what a comfort it will be!" thought little Madame Mila, carrying her frigate in full sail airily through the mazes of the cotillon, with a sleeveless bodice on, cut so low that it was really as good—or as bad—as if she had had nothing at all. She did not wish any harm, of course, only, really, Hilda, with a lover like other people, would be so much more natural and agreeable.

"But they will marry, people say," suggested M. des Gommeux, to whom alone she confided these ideas.

"When do people ever say anything that is true?" said Madame Mila, with profound contempt, tossing her little head till the Naval Power of England was in jeopardy. She was irritated to hear Maurice even talk about marriage; it was an improper thing for him even to mention, considering his relation to herself. When he approached any young girl or marriageable woman of any sort, Madame Mila bristled like a little angry terrier that sees a cat; on the whole, she was still more exacting than Mlles. Rose Thè and Boulotte, and whereas in society he could escape from them, he could in no wise escape from her.

If it had been a question of marriage for her cousin, indeed, Madame Mila would have opposed it tooth and nail; she had a feeling, a very accurate one, that Della Rocca did not approve of herself and that he would certainly never allow his wife, if he had one, to be very intimate with her. But Madame Mila knew what other people did not; that there could be no question of such a marriage for her cousin; and so she smiled on Della

Rocca, and was always engaging him to dinner; because Lady Hilda, with her lover about her, like any one else, would be so much more humanized and natural, and would sympathize so much better with other people.

That kind of virtue of Hilda's—if it were virtue—was such an odd, chilly, unpleasant thing, she thought; to live in that way, with hundreds of men seeking her, and cold alike to them all, was something so very unnatural; it was almost as bad as being one of those queer women who wouldn't tie their skirts back, or wear high heels, or dress their hair properly:—it was so strange, too, in a person who, in all other matters, was the very queen of fashion, the very head and front of the most perfect worldliness.

It was very late and daylight quite when Lady Hilda, contrary to her custom, left the ball; she had been happy with a warmth and feverishness of happiness altogether new to her; nothing more had passed between them, but they had been together all the night, although never alone.

She stood a moment in the doorway facing the daylight. Most women are ruined by such a test; she looked but the fairer for it, with the sunrise flush touching her cheeks, and the pearls and the diamonds in her hair.

"I may come to you early," he murmured, as she paused that instant on the step.

"Yes—no. No: I shall be tired. Wait till the evening. You are coming to Mila."

The words were a denial; but on her lips there was sweetness, and in her eyes a soft emotion as she moved onward and downward to the carriage.

He was not dissatisfied nor dismayed. As he drew the furs over her gold-laden skirts, his head bore lower and lower, and his lips touched her hand and her arm.

"The sun is up. I never am so late as this," she said, as though she did not feel those kisses; but, by the clear light of the day-dawn, he saw the blood mantle over her throat and bosom, and the tremulous shadow of a smile move her mouth.

The horses sprang forward; he stood on the lower step; grave and lost in thought.

"Is it too early to offer felicitations, my friend?" said the Duc de St. Louis, passing to go homeward; he had been playing whist all night.

"I do not understand you," he answered, with the tranquil falsehood of society.

The question annoyed him deeply. He loved this woman with all the tenderness and passion of his temperament, and loved her the more for the ascendency he had gained over her and the faults that he saw in her; he loved her generously, truly, and with purer desire than most men. Yet what would his love for her ever look to the world?—since he was poor.

Meanwhile she, with her fair hair tumbled about her pillows, and her gorgeous cloth of gold lying on a couch like a queen's robes abandoned, slept restlessly, yet with a smile on her face, some few hours: when she awoke it was with a smile, and with that vague sweet sense of awakening to some great joy, which is one of the most precious gifts of happiness; dreamful misty sense of expectation and recollections blending in one, and making the light of day beautiful.

She lay still some time, awake, and yet dreaming, with

half-closed eyelids and her thick hair loosened and covering her shoulders, and the sweet scent close at hand of a glassful of myrtle and calycanthus, that she had been very careful to tell them to set near her bed. Lazily, after a while, she rang a little bell, and bade her maids open her shutters, the grand light of the noonday poured into the chamber.

"Give me a mirror," she said to them.

When they gave her one, she looked at herself and smiled again: she was one of those women who are lovely when they wake: there are not many.

They brought her her chocolate, and she sipped a little of it, and lay still, looking at the myrtle and hearing the ringing of church bells from across the water; she was happy; it seemed to her that all her life before had not been happiness after all;—only pleasure.

An hour later her maid brought her a telegram. She opened it with a little impatience. Why should anything break in on her daydream?

It merely said that her brother was in Paris, and would come onward; and be with her that night. She let the papers fall, as though she were stung by an adder.

It recalled to her what she had forgotten.

CHAPTER X

LORD CLAIRVAUX arrived in time for Madame Mila's dinner. He was an affectionate and sunny-tempered man; he did not notice that his sister did not once say she was glad to see him.

Della Rocca did notice it, with that delicate unerring Italian perception, which is as fine as a needle and as subtle as mercury.

He saw, too, that something had come over her; some cloud; some change; she had lost much of her proud serenity, and she looked at him now and then with what seemed to him almost like contrition; she avoided being alone with him; he was troubled at it, but not alarmed; he knew very well that she loved him. He let her be.

An Italian has infinite passion, but he has also infinite patience in matters of love. Nor was he, now that he was assured of his power over her, wholly content to use it; if he married her, the world would always say that it was for her wealth. That means of raising his own fortunes which had seemed to him so material and legitimate all his life, now seemed to him unworthy and unmanly since he had grown to care for her. He knew that such riches as she possessed were precisely those with which he had always intended to rebuild the fallen greatness of his race; but since he had loved her it looked very different.

The charm of their intercourse to him was the as-

cendency he had won over her, the power that he had gained to lift her nature to a higher level: where would his influence be when he had once stooped to enrich himself by its means?

These fancies saddened him and checked him, and made him not unwilling to linger on about her, in all that indistinct sweetness of half-recognized and half-unspoken love.

The position, uncertain as it was, had its charm; he felt that this woman, with all her insolence and indifference and absorption by the world, was, in his hands, only a creature of emotions and of passions, who would flush at his touch, and grow unnerved under his gaze; he knew that he was very dear to her since, had he not been, for the audacity of his caresses he would have been driven out of her presence.

"Ama chit t'ama, e lascia dir la gente," he said to himself in the wise burden of the people's love-song; and he let destiny go as it would.

Meanwhile, she, dissatisfied, with a conscience ill at ease, and disinclined to look into the future, saw him morning, noon, and night, but avoided seeing him alone, and usually had her brother near.

Lord Clairvaux could only stay a week, and was utterly unconscious that his presence was unwelcome; he was taken to see the two Arab mares of Della Rocca; he was taken to Palestrina; he was taken to studios and chapels, which had no more interest for him than they would have had for a setter dog: but he was quite ignorant of why he was taken.

He did what Lady Hilda told him to do; he always did when he and she were together; he was a simple, kindly

honest gentleman, who regarded England as the universe, and all the rest of the world as a mere accident. His sister's contempt for her country and his politics, her philosophy of indifferentism, her adoration of primitive art, her variable disdain, and her intellectual pharisaism had always seemed to him very wonderful, and not altogether comfortable; but he admired her in a hopeless kind of way, and it was not in his temper to puzzle over people's differences of opinion or character.

"Hilda thinks all the old dead fellows were gods, and she thinks all of us asses," he would say humbly. "I don't know, you know,—she's awfully clever. I never was. It may be so, only I never will believe that England is used up, as she says; and I like the east wind myself; and what she can see in those saints she's just bought, painted on their tiptoes, or in those old crooked pots——but if she'd stayed in the country, and hunted twice a week all winter, you know she would not have been like that."

"It would have been a great pity had Miladi been anything save what she is," said Della Rocca, to whom he expressed himself in this manner, in such French as he could command, and who was amused and astonished by him, and who took him a day's wild fowl shooting in the marshes, and a day's wild boar hunting in the next province, and wondered constantly why so kindly and gallant a gentleman should have been made by the good God so very stupid.

"Oh, you think so; I don't," said Lord Clairvaux. "Hilda isn't my idea of a happy woman. I don't believe she is happy. She spends half her life thinking how she will dress herself and why will they dress now

like the ruffs and things of Queen Elizabeth, and the effigies on the tombstones? and the other half she spends buying things she never looks at, and ordering things she dislikes when they're done, and reading books that make her think her own countrymen are a mere lot of blockheads and barbarians. Not that I pretend to understand her; I never did; only I think if she didn't think everybody else such a fool she'd be more comfortable."

Della Rocca smiled.

"Pardon me,—you will disturb the birds."

Lord Clairvaux recollected that he ought not to talk of his sister to a stranger, and, bringing his gun to his shoulder, fired into a covey of wild ducks.

"What a handsome fellow that is, like an old picture." he thought to himself, as he looked at Della Rocca, who sat in the prow of the boat; but he did not connect him in his thoughts with Lady Hilda in any way: for ten years he had got so tired of vainly wondering why this man and that did not please her, and had been made so vexed and perplexed by her rejection of the Prince of Deutschland, that he had ceased to think of her as a woman who could possibly ever care for anybody.

One night, however, when he had been there five days, he was walked about in the crowd of the Veglione by little Madame Mila, masked, and draped as black as a little beetle; and Madame Mila, who was getting tired of things standing still, and could no more help putting her tiny finger into all kinds of pasties, and making mischief in a kittenish way, than she could help going on enamelling since she had once begun it, laughed at him, teased him, and told him, what startled him.

"But she isn't here, and he is!" he gasped feebly, in

protest at what he had heard, gazing over the motley crowd.

"What a goose you are;—as if that showed anything! They can meet much better than in this place," said Madame Mila, with a saucy laugh.

He turned on her with a heavy frown.

"Hang it, Mila! you don't dare to mean——"

Madame Mila was frightened in an instant.

"Oh, dear, no; of course not; only I do assure you they've always been together ever since I've been in Floralia. I thought you knew——"

"Damn it, no!" he muttered. "I beg your pardon, I never see anything; I mean, I'm quite sure there's nothing to see."

"Well, ask her," said Madame Mila; then she added sweetly: "You know I'm so fond of dear Hilda; and people do talk so horridly here for nothing at all; and Italians are not so scrupulous as *we* are."

He went home in haste, and was told that Miladi had retired to bed full two hours before. In the morning he sent to ask when he could see her. She sent back word that she should be happy to see him at breakfast at twelve. At ten he received a telegram from his wife asking him to return, because his eldest boy, Cheviot, was unwell, and they feared typhoid fever.

"Damn it all, what a worry!" said Lord Clairvaux to himself, and then went out and smoked on the bank of the river, and looked over the stone parapet moodily.

"Bon jour, monsieur," a voice said, passing him.

Della Rocca was driving past with a fiery little horse on his way to Palestrina. Lord Clairvaux felt inclined to stop the horse; but what could he say if he did?

What a nuisance it was, he thought; but what could go right in a country where they shot their foxes, and called their brushes tails, and hung them under the ears of cart-mules and ponies?—a country where they treated the foxes as they did, to say nothing of the Holy Father, must be a land of malediction.

He smoked through two great cigars, and walked about the town unhappily, and when it was noon went upstairs to his sister. He did not dare to go a moment before the time.

"Dear Freddie, is it you?" said the Lady Hilda, listlessly; she looked very lovely and very languid, in a white cashmere morning gown, with a quantity of lace about it, and her hair all thrown back loosely, and tied like the Venere alla Spina's.

"I have to go away by the night train. Poor little Cheviot's ill," he said disconsolately, as he took her hand; he never ventured on kissing her; years before she had taught him that such endearments were very ridiculous and disagreeable.

"Dear me, I am very sorry. Will you have coffee, or tea, or wine?" she asked absently, as she went to the table where the breakfast was.

"Chevy's very ill," said Lord Clairvaux, who thought she showed small sympathy. "You used to like Chevy."

"He was a pretty little child. I hate boys."

"You wouldn't if you had them of your own," said Lord Clairvaux, and grumbled inaudibly as he took some cutlets.

Lady Hilda coloured a little.

"I have really not imagination enough to follow

you:—will you have coffee? I hope it's nothing serious with Cheviot?"

"Fever, his mother thinks; anyway, I must go. I saw your friend the Duca della Rocca this morning: he was out early."

He thought this was approaching the subject in a masterly manner.

"Italians always rise early," said the Lady Hilda, giving him his cup.

"And he was at the Veglione last night——"

"All Italians go to the Veglione."

"You have seen a great deal of him, haven't you?" asked Lord Clairvaux, looking at her across the table, and thinking how pretty all that white was which she had on, and what a difficult person she was to begin anything with; he had never felt so nervous since the time when he had once been called on to move the Address when Parliament opened.

"One sees a great deal of everybody in a small society like this."

"Because you know people talk about you and him,—so they say, at least."

"They are very good, whoever they are: who are they?"

"Who?—Oh, I don't know; I heard so."

"How very nice of you to discuss me with other people!"

Lord Clairvaux cast a glance at her and was very much frightened at the offence he saw in her contemptuous face: how pale she was looking too, now he thought of it, and she had shadows underneath her eyes quite new to her.

"What sort of a fellow is he?" he muttered. "He seemed a duffer to me about his fields—such ploughs, by heavens!—and such waste in the stackyards *I* never saw. But it isn't farming here at all; it's letting things go wild just anyhow——"

"It is not being wiser than Nature, and sacrificing all loveliness to greed—if you mean *that,*" said Lady Hilda, with coldest disdain. "The life here has still the old Theocritan idyllic beauty, thank Heaven."

"Theocritus? Oh, I know; I never could construe him; but I do know a straight furrow and decently kept land when I see it. But I say, you know, I don't want to be officious or anything; but do you think it's wise to see so very much of him? You know he's an Italian, and I dare say hasn't a bit of principle, nor a penny in his pocket."

The hazel eyes of the Lady Hilda flashed golden beams of wrath.

"How very grateful of you!—when he has entertained you to the best of his ability, and went out of his way to find sport for you, very little to his own pleasure, moreover, for I can assure you *his* soul does not lie in his gun-barrel!"

"I don't want to say anything against him," murmured Lord Clairvaux, who was the most grateful and most just of mortals. "He was very kind and courteous, and all that—and I don't say he's a bad shot, though he's a bad farmer—and he is an awfully good-looking fellow, like an old picture, and all that. Only I must go tonight, Hilda, and I do want to speak to you."

"You are speaking all this time, I believe," said Lady

Hilda icily, looking across at him with the coldest challenge in her darkening eyes.

"I never could think why you didn't take Deutschland," he muttered, reverting to an old grievance.

"He didn't please me. Is that all you wanted to say?"

"But I thought you'd have cared to be a reigning sovereign?"

"Of a small State?" said the Lady Hilda, with an eloquent lift of her eyebrows.

"Well, there was De Ribeaupierre; he was everything anybody could want; Vienna, too; I used to think an Ambassadress's life would just suit you."

"Always calling on people and writing notes? No life on earth more tiresome."

"I suppose you want to be an Empress?"

"Oh, dear, no!" answered his sister. "I have known two Empresses intimately; and it is a career of great tedium: you can never do what you like."

"Then, I suppose, you are content as you are?"

"I suppose so, if anybody ever is. I don't think any one is. I never met anybody who was. They say pigs are; but one sees so little of pigs that one can't make much psychological study of them."

Lord Clairvaux grumbled, sighed, and took his courage *à deux mains.*

"Well, never mind the other men; they are past and gone, poor wretches; what do you mean to do about this one?"

"This what?" said Lady Hilda, looking languidly at him through the flowers on the breakfast table. She knew quite well what he meant.

"What do you mean to do with him?" repeated Lord Clairvaux solemnly, pushing his plate away. "It's all very pretty, I dare say. Romeo and moonlight and poetry and all that sort of thing; Italians are the deuce and all for that, only I shouldn't have thought you'd have cared for it; and besides, you know it can't go on:—the man's a gentleman, that I grant; and, by heaven, that's a great deal nowadays, such blackguards as we're getting,—three card scandals in the club already this very winter, and George Orme's was regular sharping, just what any cad might do, by Jove! But you know you can't go on with it; you can't possibly mean it seriously, now, do you?"

Lady Hilda laughed that little cold, contemptuous laughter which her brother always shivered under, and which Della Rocca had never heard.

"I don't seriously mean to cheat at cards! My dear Frederic, you must say what you mean, if you mean anything at all, a little more clearly, please. Why will all Englishmen get their talk into such odd confusion? I suppose it comes of never learning grammar at Eton."

"Well, hang it then, I'll say it clearly," retorted Clairvaux, with some indignation. "Mila tells me you and this Italian that's always after you, have taken a liking to one another: is it true?—and what do you mean to do with him? There!"

He was horribly frightened when he had said it, but what he thought was his duty, that he did: and he conceived it to be his duty to speak.

All the blood leapt into the fair face of the Lady

Hilda, her nostrils dilated in a fine anger, her lips grew pale.

"Mila is a little wretch!" she said, with strong passion; then was still; she was too generous to quote her own generosity, or urge her past gifts as present claims. "She is a little fool!" she added, with bitter disdain; "and how can *you* cheapen my name by listening to her chattering folly? Besides, what have you to do with me—or what has she? I am not used to dictation—nor to interference!"

"Oh, I know," said her brother, humbly. "And I beg your pardon, you are sure, and all that;—only, just tell me, how will it end?"

"How will what end?"

"This fancy of yours."

Lady Hilda grew very pale.

"My dear Clairvaux," she said, with chilliest contempt, "you are not my keeper, nor my husband, nor anything else, except one of my trustees. I do not know that being a trustee gives you a title to be impertinent. You really talk as you might to your gamekeeper's daughter, if you thought you saw the girl 'going wrong.' What M. Della Rocca feels for me is merely sympathy in ideas and tastes. But if it were anything else, whose business would it be?"

Lord Clairvaux laughed.

"Yes!—you are a likely creature to inspire friendship! As if there were ever a woman worth looking at who could keep a man at that!—don't let us fence about it, Hilda. Perhaps I haven't any right to say anything. You're your own mistress and all that, and answerable

to nobody. Only, can you deny that I am your brother?"

"I have always understood that you were! I confess you make me regret the circumstance."

"Now, that's ill-natured, very ill-natured," he murmured pathetically. "But you won't make me quarrel. There must be two to quarrel, and I won't be one. We have always been good friends, more than good friends. I thought I was the only person on earth you did like——"

"And, like every one else, you consider that the liking you inspire confers a privilege to be impertinent," said his sister, with all that disdainful anger flashing from her languid eyes, which none of her family ever cared very much to meet.

She had risen from her chair, and was moving to and fro with a restless, controlled impatience. She remained very pale. Clairvaux kept his position on the hearth-rug with a dogged good humour, and an uneasy confusion blended together which, at any other time, would have diverted her.

"Perhaps I may be impertinent," he said, humbly, "though, hang me, if I can see that that's a natural sort of word to be used between a brother and sister. I know you're a mighty great lady, and 'a law to yourself,' as some poet says; and never listen to anybody, and always go your own ways, and all that,—but still, if you never speak to me afterwards, I must say what I want to say. This man is in love with you, it's my belief you're in love with him—Mila says so, and she knows. Now, granted that it is so (if it isn't there'

nothing to be angry about), what I say is, how do you mean it to end? Will you marry him?"

Her face changed, flushed, and then grew pale again.

"Of course not! You know it is impossible!"

"Does he know why it is impossible?"

"No—why should he? Really you do not know what you are talking about. You are interfering, in the most uncalled-for manner, where there is not the slightest necessity for any interference."

"Then you are letting him fall in love with you in the dark, and when you have had enough of the sport will throw him over?"

"You grow very coarse, Clairvaux. Oblige me by dropping the subject."

"I didn't know I was coarse. That is what you are going to do. You accept all his court now—and then you'll turn round on him some fine morning and say you've had enough of it. At least, I can't see what else you will do—since you cannot marry him. You'll hardly lower yourself to Mila's level and all the other women's —by heavens, if I thought you would, if I thought you had done, I'd soon see if this fellow were as fine a swordsman as they say!"

Lady Hilda turned her face full on him.

"So my brother is the first person that ever dared to insult me?" she said, with utmost coldness, as she rose from the breakfast table and swept his feet in passing with the lace that fringed the hem of her cashmere robes.

She gave him one parting look, and left the chamber.

He stood cowed by the golden fire of those superb im-

perious hazel eyes. He was nervous at what he had done, and unhappy and perplexed. He stood alone, pulling at his fair beard, in troubled repentance. He knew what her wrath would be. She was not a woman who quickly forgave.

"I've blundered; I always do blunder," he thought sadly to himself. "She must care awfully about him to be so angry."

He waited all alone many minutes; he was sincerely sorry; perhaps he had been coarse; he had not meant to be; only, the idea of *her* talked about, and with lovers—just like all those other women whom their husbands or brothers ought to strangle—it was only fashion, they said, only the way of the world, all that immorality;—"Damn the world," he said to himself, ruffling his beard in sad bewilderment.

He scribbled a trite, rough, penitent note, and sent it to her by her maid. They brought him a closed envelope: when he opened it he found only his own note inside—sent back without any word.

Honest Clairvaux's eyes filled with tears.

"She'll never see me again before I go tonight," he thought to himself, tossing his poor little rejected morsel into the wood fire. "And I must go tonight, because of poor little Chevy. How horrid it is!—I couldn't be angry like that with her!"

He stood some moments more, knitting his fair, frank forehead, and wishing that he were less stupid in managing things; he had never in his life before presumed to condemn and counsel his sister—and this was the result!

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he rose.

"I will tell him," he thought. "I will tell him himself. And then I shall see what sort of stuff he is made of;—I can fight him afterwards if he don't satisfy me;—I'll tell him as if I suspected nothing—I can make an excuse, but when he hears it he'll show what he's made of;—oh, Lord, if it were only an Englishman she'd taken a liking to!—and to think that she's treated half the best men in Europe as if they were only so many stones under her feet!"

With a groan, Lord Clairvaux took up his hat, and went forth towards the Palazzo Della Rocca.

At six o'clock that evening he had to take his departure without seeing his sister again. He went away with a heavy heart.

"How extraordinary she is!" he thought. "Never even to ask me if I told the man anything or not. And never to bid one good-bye! Well, I've done for the best—I can't help it. She'll be sorry if poor little Chevy should die."

But the boy did not die; so that his father never learned whether that event would have touched the heart of Lady Hilda or not.

All the following day she shut herself up in her rooms. She said she was ill; and, in truth, she felt so. Della Rocca called three times in the day, but she did not see him; he sent up a great bouquet of the pale yellow tea roses of which she was so fond; he had fastened the flowers together with an antique silver zone, on which was the Greek Love in relief; the Love of the early Hellenic poets, without wings and with a mighty sword, the Love of Anacreon, which forges the soul as a smith his iron, and steeps it in icy waters after many blows.

She understood the message of the Love, but she sent no message back.

It was a lovely day; underneath the windows the carriages were rolling; there was the smile of spring on the air as the fleecy clouds went sailing past; she could see the golden reaches of the river and the hyacinth-hued hills where Palestrina lay; her heart was heavy; her pulse was quick; her conscience was ill at ease; her thoughts were restless and perturbed. Solitude and reflection were so new to her; they appalled her. When she had been unwell before, which had been but seldom, she had always beguiled herself by looking over the jewels in their cases, sorting rare old Marcantonios and Morghens, skimming French feuilletons or planning new confections for her vast stores of old laces. But now none of these distractions were possible to her; she sat doing nothing, weary, feverish, and full of a passionate pain.

The fact which her brother had told to Della Rocca was that, if she married again, all her riches would pass away from her.

At the time of her marriage her father had been deeply involved in debt; gambling, racing, and debts of every other kind had been about him like spiders' webs; the great capitalist, Vorarlberg, had freed him on condition of receiving the hand of his young daughter in exchange. She was allowed to know nothing of these matters; but under such circumstances it was impossible for the family to be exacting as regarded sentiments: she was abandoned entirely to the old man's power. Fortunately for herself, he was taken ill on the very day of the nuptials, and, after a lingering period of suffering, died, leaving her

mistress of half of one of the finest fortunes in Europe. By birth he was a Wallachian Jew, brought up in London and Paris, but he had been naturalized in England, when a youth, for commercial objects, and the disposition of his property lay under his own control. A year or two after his death a later will was found by his lawyers, still leaving her the same income, but decreeing that in the event of her second marriage everything should pass away from her to the public charities, save alone her jewels, her horses, all things she might have purchased, the house in Paris, which had been a gift, and some eight hundred a year already secured to her. The new will was proved, and she was informed that she could enjoy her fortune only by this tenure. She was indifferent. She was quite sure that she would never wish to marry any one. She loved her wealth and spent it magnificently; and when men sought her whose own position would have made the loss of her own money of no moment, she still repulsed them, thinking always "le mieux est l'ennemi du bien."

The fact of this later will was scarcely known beyond the precincts of the law and the circle of their own family; but since she had met Della Rocca, the remembrance of it had kept her awake many a night, and broken roughly many a daydream.

To surrender her fortune to become his wife never once occurred to her as possible; ten years' enjoyment of her every whim had made it seem so inalienably hers. She had entered so early into her great possessions, that they had grown to be a very part of her. The old man who had been her husband but in name was but a mere ghostly shadow to her. The freedom and the self-in-

dulgence she had so long enjoyed had become necessary to her as the air she breathed. She could no more face the loss of her fortune than she could have done that of her beauty. It was not the mere vulgar vaunt or ostentation of wealth that had attraction for her; it was all the supremacy, the ease, the patronage, the habits, that great wealth alone makes possible; it was the reign which she had held throughout Europe; it was the charm of perfectly irresponsible power. To give up these and hear the cackle of all the fools she had eclipsed mocking at her weakness!—it would be beyond all endurance.

What was she to do?

The lax moralities of the women of her time were impossible to her proud and loftier character; and besides, she felt that a woman who preferred the world to him, would not find in Della Rocca a forgiving or a submissive lover. When he knew, what would he say?

She turned sick at the thought. After all, she had played with him and deceived him; he would have just cause of passionate reproach against her. His love had no wings, but it had a sword.

"Will Miladi be able to dine?" her maid asked her, vaguely alarmed at the strange stillness and the great paleness of her face.

"Was I to dine anywhere?" she said wearily.

She was to dine at the Archduchess Anna's. The Archduchess Anna was passing through Floralia after three months at Palermo for health, and was staying in strict *incognita,* and infinite glee, as the Countess Von Feffers at the Hotel del Rè; enjoying herself endlessly, as the gay-hearted lady that she was, even indulging once in the supreme delight of driving in a cab, and with

no other recognition of her great rank than consisted in the attendance upon her of the handsomest of the king's chamberlains.

"Dress me, then," said Lady Hilda, with a sigh. She could not excuse herself to the Archduchess, whom she had known intimately for years, and who was to leave Floralia in a week.

"What gown does Madame select?" asked her maid.

"Give me any you like," she answered.

She did not care how she would look; she would not meet him; she knew that he had no acquaintance with the imperial lady.

The maids, left to themselves, gave her the last new one from Worth; only six days arrived; a dress entirely white, with knots of purple velvet, exactly copied from a picture of Boucher, and with all the grace of dead Versailles in its folds. She put a rococo necklace on, with a portrait of Maria Theresa in it, and went listlessly to the dinner; she was not thinking about her appearance that night, or she would have said that she was too pale to wear all that white.

"Goodness me, Hilda, how ill you do look!" said Madame Mila, meeting her on the stairs, and who was going also.

"No, thanks, I won't drive with you; two women can't go in a carriage without one being *chiffonnée*. That's an exquisite toilette; that white brocade is delicious—stamped with the lilies of France,—very pretty; only you're too pale for it tonight, and it's a pity to wear it only for the Archduchess. She never knows what anybody's got on their backs. Is anything the matter, dear?"

"Nothing in the world."

"Then you must have got a headache? You certainly do look very ill. I do so hope we shall get away in time for the Veglione. It's the very last night, you know. I had such fun last time. I *intrigué'd* heaps of people, and Doggendorff I drove wild; I told him everything about his wife and Lelio Castelpucci, and all against himself that she'd ever told me. It was such fun—he'd not an idea who I was, for when we were at supper, he came running in breathless to tell us of a horrible little mask with a voice like a macaw's;—you know I'd put a pebble under my tongue."

"Very dangerous pastime, and a very vulgar one,' said the Lady Hilda, descending the staircase. "How can you go down into that horrible screeching mob, Mila? It is so very low."

"My dear, I go anywhere to amuse myself, and Maurice was always near me, you know, so if I had been insulted—— There's eight o'clock striking."

The Hotel del Rè was but ten minutes' drive along the famous river-street, which has such an Arabian Nights-like beauty when the lamps are lighted, and gleam in long lines adown each shore, and mirror themselves in the water, whilst dome, and bell-tower and palace roof raise themselves darkly against the steel-blue sky of the night.

The Archduchess had been spending a long day in the galleries, studying art under the guidance of the hand some chamberlain; she was hungry, happy, and full of the heartiest spirits; she was a very merry and good natured person, about five-and-forty years old, fat and fair, very badly dressed, and very agreeable, with a fran

laugh, and a strong love of humour; she had had more escapades than any princess in Europe, and smoked more cigars than a French newspaper writer, and had married more daughters to German cousins than anybody else in the Almanach de Gotha.

Had she been any lesser being, Society would have turned its back on her; but, being who she was, her nod was elevation, and her cigar-ash honour,—and, to do her justice, she was one of the most amiable creatures in all creation.

"Ma chère, you are lovelier than ever!—and how do you like this place?—and is the dear little pug alive? I lost my sweet Zaliote of asthma in Palermo," said the Archduchess, welcoming the Lady Hilda, as she did everything with ardour.

Lady Hilda, answering, felt her colourless cheeks grow warm; in the circle standing round she recognized Della Rocca. The Archduchess had taken a fancy to the look of him in the street, and had bade the chamberlain present him, and then had told him to come to dinner: she liked to surround herself with handsome men. From Madame Mila he had learned in the morning that her cousin would dine there at night.

Madame Mila concluded in her own mind that Freddie had had a row with his sister upon the matter, but that Della Rocca had had nothing said to him about it by either of them. Madame Mila concluded also that Hilda had grown sensible, and was doing like other women, though why she looked so ill about it, Madame Mila could not imagine. Madame Mila did not comprehend scruples.

It was very painful, for instance, to be allied to any

one of the Greek Church, and a great grief to the Holy Father; but still it was very nice to be married to a Schismatic, because it enabled you to go to balls a fortnight longer: if it was still your husband's carnival, you know, nobody could say anything.

Madame Mila thought you should always do your best to please everybody; but then you should take care that you pleased yourself first most of all. The world was easy enough to live in if you did not worry: there were always unpaid bills to be sure, and they were odious. But then Hilda never had any unpaid bills; so she never could have anything to annoy her.

Apropos of bills, she hoped Della Rocca would not use his influence with her cousin so as to prevent her paying other people's bills. Of course he wouldn't do this just at present; but when men had been lovers a little while, she reflected, they always turned the poetry into prose, and grew nearly as bad as husbands.

Madame Mila watched them narrowly all through dinner.

"If I thought he'd make her stingy, I'd make her jealous of Giulia Malatesta tomorrow," she thought to herself. Madame Mila on occasion had helped or hindered circumstance amongst her friends and enemies with many ingenious little devices and lucky little anonymous notes, and other innocent shifts and stratagems. It was no use being in the world at all unless you interfered with the way it went; to be a mere puppet in the hands of Fate, with the strings of accident dangling to and fro, seemed to her clever little brains quite unworthy the intelligence of woman.

She never meant to do any harm, oh, never; only she

ked things to go as she wished them. Who does not? a few men and women had been made wretched for fe, and people who loved one another devotedly had een parted for ever, and suspicion and hatred had crept to the place of trust and tenderness in certain house-olds, Madame Mila could not help that, any more than ne can help other people being splashed with mud when ne drives down a lane in bad weather. And nobody er thought Madame Mila could do any harm; pretty, ood-natured, loquacious, little Madame Mila, running out with her little rosebuds at fancy fairs, and saying sweetly, "Pour nos pauvres—pour nos chers pauvres!" "The best little woman in the world," as everybody id, Madame Mila would kiss her female enemies on th cheeks wherever she met them; and when she had nt an anonymous letter (for fun), always sent an in-tation to dinner just after it, to the same direction.

"I wish I knew how it is really between them," she ought at the Archduchess's dinner-table, divided be-veen her natural desire to see her cousin let fall that white flower of a blameless life," which stinks as garlic the nostrils of those who have it not, and her equally tural apprehension that Paolo della Rocca as a lover ould not let his mistress pay other persons' debts, and ould also be sure to see all her letters.

"She'll tell him everything about everybody," thought Madame Mila, uncomfortably; for Della Rocca had a ok in his eyes of assured happiness, which, to the as-te experience of Madame Mila, suggested volumes.

Meantime she was also harassed by an apprehension at she would not be able to withdraw in time for the eglione, where Maurice, a baignoire, and a supper-table

awaited her. If the Archduchess should sit down to play of any sort hope was over, escape would be impossible till daydawn; and Madame Mila hated playing with the Archduchess; with such personages she was afraid to cheat, and was obliged to pay.

With all the ingenuity, therefore, of which she was mistress, she introduced the idea of the Veglione into the mind of her hostess, and so contrived to fascinate her with the idea, that the Archduchess, who had gone in her time to five hundred public masked balls, was as hotly animated into a desire to go to this one as though she had just been let out of a convent at eighteen years old.

Madame Mila delightedly placed her baignoire at the disposition of her imperial highness, and her imperial highness invited all her guests to accompany her; such invitations are not optional; and Lady Hilda, who hated noise as her horses hated masks, was borne off by the mirthful, chattering, and gay-hearted lady, who had no objection to noise, and loved fun and riot like a street boy.

Lady Hilda thought a Veglione, and a liking for it, both beneath contempt; yet she was not unwilling to avoid all chance of being alone with Della Rocca even for a moment. She knew what he would say:—his eyes had said it all the evening a thousand times.

The Archduchess Anna and Madame Mila were both in the very highest spirits; they had taken a good deal of champagne, as ladies will, and had smoked a good deal and got thirsty, and had more champagne with some seltzer water, and the result was the highest of high spirits. Nothing could be more appropriate to a Vegli-

one; as no reasonable being could stay by choice in one for an hour, it is strongly advisable that reason should be a little dethroned by a very dry wine before entering the dingy paradise. Of course nobody ever sees great ladies "the worse for wine"; they are only the better, as a Stilton cheese is.

Happy and hilarious, shrouded and masked beyond all possibility of identification, and ready for any adventure, the Archduchess Anna was no sooner in the box than she was out of it, and declared her intention of going down into the crowd. Madame Mila, only too glad, went with her, and some half-dozen men formed their escort. Lady Hilda excused herself on the plea of a headache, a plea not untrue, and alone with the Duc de St. Louis awaited the return of her hostess. She had only put on her mask for entry, and had now laid it beside her; she threw aside her domino, for the heat of the box was stifling, and the whiteness of her dress shone as lilies do at moonlight. She leaned her cheek on her hand, and looked down on to the romping, screaming, many-coloured throngs.

"You are not well tonight, Madame?" said the Duc, with the affectionate solicitude that he felt for all pretty women.

He was puzzled as to how her relations could stand with Della Rocca: the previous night he had thought everything settled, but now he did not feel quite so sure.

"The Archduchess is so noisy; it always gives me a headache to dine with her," said Lady Hilda. "She is very good-natured; but her talking is——"

"She is an admirable heavy dragoon—*manqué*," said the Duc. "Most good-natured, as you say, but trying to

the tympanum and the taste. So Clairvaux left last night?"

"Yes: Cheviot was taken ill."

"I should have thought it was a racer taken ill by the consternation he seemed to be in. I saw him for a moment only."

She was silent, watching the whirling of the pierrots harlequins, scaramouches and dominoes, who were shrieking and yelling in the throng below.

"I think he liked his shooting with Paolo?" said the Duc, at a hazard.

"He likes shooting anywhere."

"Certainly there is something wrong," thought the Duc, stooping a little to look at her brocaded white lilies. "What an exquisite toilette!—is one permitted to say so?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said the Lady Hilda petulantly "The incessant talk about dress is so tiresome and so vulgar; the women who want their costumes praised are women who have only just begun to dress tolerably, and are still not quite sure of the effects!"

"You are right, as always," said the Duc, with a little bow and a little smile. "But now and then perfection surprises us into involuntary indiscretion. You must not be too severe."

"Somebody should be severe," she said, contemptuously. "Society is a Battle of the Frogs, for rivalry in dress and debt."

The Duc laughed.

"What do you know about it, Madame? You who are as above rivals as above debts? By the way, you told me you wanted some old Pesaro vases. I found some

yesterday at Biangini's shop that might please you; they come out of an old pharmacy in Verona; perhaps the very pharmacy of Romeo's apothecary; and there are some fine old pots too——"

"I am tired of buying things."

"The weariness of empire!—nothing new. You must take to keeping hens and chickens, as the Emperor John Vatices did. How does Camille Odissôt succeed with your ballroom frescoes?"

"I have no idea. Very ill, I dare say."

"Yes, it is a curious thing that we do not succeed in fresco. The grace is gone out of it; modern painters have not the lightness of touch necessary; they are used to masses of colour, and they use the palette knife as a mason the trowel. The art, too, like the literature of our time, is all detail; the grand suggestive vagueness of the Greek drama and of the Umbrian frescoes are lost to us under a crowd of elaborated trivialities; perhaps it is because art has ceased to be spiritual or tragic, and is merely domestic or melodramatic; the Greeks knew nothing of domesticity or melodrama, and the early Italian painters were imbued with a faith which, if not so virile as the worship of the Phidian Zeus, yet absorbed them and elevated them in a degree impossible in the tawdry Sadduceeism of our own day. By the way, when the weather is milder you must go to Orvieto; you have never been there, I think; it is the Prosodion of Signorelli. What a fine Pagan he was at heart! He admired masculine beauty like a Greek; he must have been a singularly happy man—few more happy——"

The Duc paused as the handle of the door turned; he was only talking because he saw that she was too

weary or too languid to talk herself; the door opened, and Della Rocca entered the box again, having escaped from the Archduchess.

"We were speaking of Orvieto; you know more of it than I do. I was telling Miladi that she must go there about Easter time," said the Duc, hunting for his crush hat beneath the chair. "Take my seat, mon cher, for a moment; I see Salvareo in the crowd, and I must speak to him about her imperialissima's supper. I shall be back in an instant."

He departed, with no intention of returning, and was assailed in the corridor by a party of masks, who bore him off gaily between them down the staircase into the laughing, screaming, and capering multitude.

Della Rocca did not take his chair, but sank into the seat behind her, while his hand closed on hers.

"Will you not even look at me?" he murmured.

She drew her hand away, and put her mask on, slipping its elastic round her delicate ears.

"How the crowd yells!" she said, impatiently. "Will the Archduchess stay there long, do you think?"

With gentlest audacity and softest skill he had slipped off the mask and had laid it behind him before she had realized what he was doing; his hand had touched her as lightly as though a feather brushed a rose.

She rose in amazed anger, and turned on him coldly.

"M. Della Rocca! how dare you presume so far? Give me my mask at once——"

"No," he said, softly; and he took hold of her hands and drew her towards the back of the box where no eyes could reach them, and knelt down before her as

she sat there in the dusky shadow of the dark red draperies.

"Oh, my love—my love!" he murmured; that was all; but his arms stole about her, and his head drooped till his forehead rested on her knees.

For the moment she did not repulse him; she did not stir nor speak; she yielded herself to the embrace, mute and very pale, and moved to a strange tumult of emotion, whether of anger or of gladness she barely knew.

He lifted his head, and his eyes looked into hers till her own could look no longer.

"You love me?" he whispered to her, whilst his arms still held her imprisoned.

She was silent; under the purple knot of velvet at her breast, he saw her heart heave, her breath come and go; a hot colour flushed over all her face, then faded, and left her again pale as her white brocade.

"It were of no use if—if I did," she muttered. "You forget yourself;—leave me."

But he knelt there, looking at her till the look seemed to burn her like flame; yet she did not rise:—she, the very hem of whose garment no man before him had ever dared to touch.

"You love me!" he murmured, and said the same thing again and again and again, in all the various eloquence of passion. She trembled a little under his close caress; the dusky red of the box whirled around her; the shouting of the multitude below beat like the sound of a distant sea on her ears.

As he kneeled at her feet she touched his forehead one moment with her hand in a gesture of involuntary tenderness.

"It is of no use," she said, faintly again. "You do not understand—you do not know."

"Yes: I do know," he answered her.

"You know!"

"Yes: your brother told me."

"And yet——"

"Since we love one another, is not that enough?"

She breathed like a person suffocated; she loosened herself from his arms, and drew away from him, and rose.

"It makes no change in you, then!" she said, wonderingly, and looked at him through a blinding mist, and felt sick and weary and bewildered, as she had never thought it possible to feel.

"Change in me? What change? save that I am freer to seek you—that is all. Oh, my empress, my angel!—is not love enough? Has your life without love contented you so well that you fear to face love alone?"

He still knelt at her feet and kissed her hands and her dress as he spoke; he looked upward at the pale beauty of her face.

She shivered a little as with cold.

"That is folly," she muttered. "You must know it is of no use. I could not live—poor."

The word stung him: he rose to his feet; he was silent. After all, what had he to offer her? he loved her—that was all.

She loosened the loose chain about her throat, and looked away beyond him at the lights of the theatre. With an effort she recovered her old indifferent cold manner.

"You have forgotten yourself: it is all folly: you must

know that: you surprised me into—weakness—for a moment. But it is over now. Give me my mask, and take me to the carriage."

"No!" He leaned against the door, and looked down on her: all the rapture of expectancy and of triumph had faded from his face; the pallor and suffering of a great passion were on it; he had known that she loved the things of the world; but he had believed that she loved him more.

He was undeceived. He looked at this beautiful woman with the gold chain loosed about her throat, and the white brocaded lilies gleaming in the gloom, and only by a supreme effort did he subdue the bitterness and brutality which lie underneath all strong passions.

"One moment!" he said, as she moved to reach the door. "Can you say you have no love for me?"

Her colour varied.

"What is the use? Give me my mask."

"Can you say you do not love me?"

She hesitated; she wished to lie and could not.

"I did not say that," she murmured. "Perhaps if things were different—— But, as it is—it is no use."

The half-confession sufficed, it loosened his lips to passionate appeal; with all the eloquence natural to him and to his language, he poured out on her all the supplication, all the entreaty, all the persuasion, that he was master of; he lavished every amorous endearment that his language held; he painted the joys of great and mutual passion with a fervour and a force that shook her like a whirlwind; he upbraided her with her caprices, with her coldness, with her selfishness, till the words cut her like sharp stripes: he besought her by the love with

which he loved her till the voluptuous sweetness of it stole over all her senses, and held her silent and enthralled.

He knelt at her feet, and held her hands in his.

"Does your life content you?" he said at the last. "Can greatness of any sort content a woman without love? Can any eminence, or power, or possession make her happiness without love? Say that I am poor; that coming to me you would come to what in your sight were poverty; is wealth so great a thing measured against the measureless strength of passion? Are not the real joys of our lives things unpurchasable? Oh, my love, my love! If you had no preference for me I were the vainest fool to urge you; but, as it is—does the world that tires you, the society that wearies you, the men and women who fatigue you—the adulation that nauseates you—the expenditure that after all is but a vulgarity in your sight—the acquisition that has lost its charm for you with long habit, like the toys of a child; are all those things so supreme with you that you can send me from you for their sake? Is not one hour of mutual love worth all the world can give?"

His arms held her close, he drew her down to him nearer and nearer till his head rested on her breast, and he felt the tumultuous throbbing of her heart. For one moment of scarce conscious weakness she did not resist or repulse him, but surrendered herself to the spell of his power. He moved her as no mortal creature had ever had strength to do; a whole world unknown opened to her with his touch and his gaze; she loved him. For one moment she forgot all else.

But all the while, even in the temporary oblivion to

which she had yielded, she never dreamed of granting what he prayed.

The serenity and pride in her were shaken to their roots; she was humbled in her own sight; she was ashamed of the momentary delirium to which she had abandoned herself; she strove in vain to regain composure and indifference: come what would, he was near to her as no other man had ever been.

She drew her domino about her with a shudder, though the blood coursed like fever in her veins.

"You must hate me—or forget me," she murmured, as she tried to take her mask from his hand. "You *know* it is no use. I could not live—poor. Perhaps you are right; all those things are habits, follies, egotisms—oh, perhaps. But such as they are—such as I am—I could never live without them."

He stood erect, and his face grew cold.

"That is your last word, Madame?"

"Yes. What else should I say? No other"—her voice faltered a moment and grew very weak—"no other man will ever be anything to me, if that content you. But more—is impossible."

He bowed low in silence, and gave her up her mask.

She felt afraid to look up at his face.

The door opened on them noisily; the Archduchess and Madame Mila were returning to refresh themselves with their supper ere descending again to fresh diversions. Behind them came the Duc de St. Louis and all the men of their party, and their servants with the trestles for the setting of the table in their box.

They were fuller than ever of laughter, mirth, high spirits, and riotous good humour; their white teeth shone

under the lace of their loups, and their eyes sparkled through the slits. They had frightened some people, and teased more, and had been mistaken for two low actresses and jested with accordingly, and were as much flattered as the actresses would have been had they been taken for princesses.

The Lady Hilda prayed of the Archduchess's goodness to be excused from awaiting the supper; she had been ill all day, and her headache was very severe.

The Archduchess was in too high spirits to listen very much, or to care who went or who stayed.

"Take me to the carriage, Duc," said Lady Hilda, putting her hand on the arm of M. de St. Louis.

Della Rocca held the door open for her. He bowed very low, once more, as she passed him.

CHAPTER XI

THE next day was Ash Wednesday.

Madame Mila awoke too late for mass, and with a feverish throbbing in her temples. She and the Archduchess had only left the Veglione as the morning sun came up bright and tranquil over the shining waters of the river from behind the eastern hills.

Madame Mila yawned and yawned again a score of times, drank a little green tea to waken herself, thought how horrid Lent was, and ran over in her mind how much she would confess at confession.

She determined to repent her sins very penitently. She would only go to musical parties, she would wear no low bodices, she would eat fish twice a week—the red mullets were really very nice—and she would go for all holy week *en retraite:* if she did all that, the most severe monitor could not require her to give up Maurice.

Poor Maurice! she smiled to herself, in the middle of a yawn; how devoted he was!—he only lived on her breath, and if she dismissed him would kill himself with absinthe. She really believed it. She did not dream that Maurice, submissive slave though he was, had his consolations for slavery, and was at that moment looking into the eyes of the prettiest artist's model in Floralia.

It was the Day of Ashes, as all the bells of the city had tolled out far and wide; and Madame Mila, over her green tea, really felt penitent. For the post had

brought her three terribly thick letters, and the letters were bills; and the sum total wanted immediately was some sixty thousand francs, and how could a poor dear little woman who had spent all her money send that or a tenth of it: and Spiridion wouldn't—he had too many bills of Blanche Souris' to pay; and poor Maurice couldn't—he invariably lost at play much more than he possessed, after the manner of his generation.

Madame Mila really cried about it, and felt ready to promise any amount of repentance if she could get those sixty thousand francs this Lent.

"And to think of me running myself off my feet in that muslin apron collecting for the poor!" she thought, with a sense that Heaven behaved very ill to her in return for her charities. "I suppose I must ask Hilda," she reflected; "she always does give when you ask her—if that man don't prevent her now."

For the champagne and the mask and the great joyousness of her soul had prevented Madame Mila from observing any difference between her cousin and Della Rocca, and as he had left the box immediately after her cousin, she had supposed that they had gone away together—why shouldn't they?

"I must ask Hilda to lend it me," she said to herself. To say "lend" was agreeable to her feelings, not of course that there was any serious necessity to repay between such near relatives; and she sent her maid across the corridor to enquire when she could come into her cousin's room.

The maid returned with a little unsealed note which the Lady Hilda had desired should be given to Madame Mila when she should awake. The note only said:

"I am gone to Rome for some few weeks, dear; write to me at the Iles Britanniques if you want anything."

"Good gracious, what can have happened!" said Madame Mila, in utter amaze. "They must have quarrelled last night." And she proceeded to cross-examine all the hotel people.

Lady Hilda had left by the morning train, and had not taken her carriage horses with her, only the riding horses, and had kept on her rooms at the Murat: that was all they knew.

"She is very uncertain and uncomfortable to have to do with," thought Madame Mila, in vague irritation. "Anybody else would have asked me to go with her."

A sudden idea occurred to her, and she sent her maid to find out if the Duca della Rocca were in Floralia.

At his palace they said that he was.

"Dear me, perhaps he'll go after her," thought Madame Mila. "But I don't know why she's so secret about it, and takes such precautions. Nobody'd cut her for anything she might do so long as she's all that money; and so long as she don't marry she can't lose it."

Madame Mila did not understand it at all. Her experience in the world assured her that her cousin might have Della Rocca, or anybody else, constantly beside her whenever she liked, and nobody would say anything —so long as she had all that money.

She felt that she was badly treated, that there was something not confided to her, and also she certainly ought to have been asked to go to Rome at her cousin's expense. She was sulky and irritated.

"Hilda is so queer and so selfish," she said to herself, and began a letter to the Iles Britanniques; with many

tender endearments and much pathos, and the most gracefully worded appeal possible for the loan of the sixty thousand francs.

She would have gone to Rome herself, being well aware that written demands are much more easily repulsed than spoken ones. But she had no money at all. She had lost a quarter's income at play since she had been in the town, and she could not pay the hotel people till her husband should send her more money, and he was hunting bears on the Pic du Midi, with Blanche Souris established at Pau, and when that creature was with him he was always very tardy in answering letters for money, bears or no bears, and of course he would make the bears his excuse now.

Fairly overwhelmed, poor little Madame Mila had a long fit of hysterics, and her maids had to send in great haste for ether and the Vicomte Maurice.

She rallied by dinner time enough to eat two dozen oysters, some lobster croquettes, an omelette *aux fines herbes,* and some prawn soup, with a nice little bottle of Veuve. Clicquot's sweetest wine, the most *maigre* repast in the world, and one that must have satisfied even S. Francis had he been there; but still things were very dreadful, and on the whole she was in the proper frame of mind for the Day of Ashes, and in the confessional next morning sobbed so much that her confessor was really touched, and was not too severe with her about her Maurices, past, present, or to come.

CHAPTER XII

IN THREE weeks' time Lady Hilda returned from Rome. She had been affectionately received by the Holy Father; she had been the idol of the nobles of the Black; she had bought a quantity of pictures, and marbles, and bronzes, and Castellani jewellery; she had gone to early mass every day, and ridden hard every day; she had thought Totila would have been more bearable than Signor Rosa, and she had shuddered at the ruined flora of the Colosseum and the scrapings and bedaubings of the Palace of the Caesars.

She returned contemptuous, disgusted, tired of the age she lived in, and regretful that she had not spared herself the sight of so much desecration. She conceived that Genseric or the Constable de Bourbon must have been much less painful than a syndicate and an army of bricklayers. She refused to go out anywhere on the score of its being Lent, and she meditated going to London for the season to that very big house in Eaton Square, which she honoured for about three months in as many years. She hated London, and its society was a mob, and its atmosphere was thickened soda-water, and no other place had such horrible endless dinner parties. Still she was going;—when?—oh, tomorrow or next week.

But tomorrow became yesterday, and next week became last week, and her black and white liveries were

still airing themselves on the steps of the Murat, and her black horses still were trotting to and fro the stones of Floralia, bearing little Madame Mila hither and thither.

Their own mistress stirred out but little; it was damp weather, and she coughed, and she shut herself up with millions of hyacinths and narcissi, and painted a St. Ursula on wood for her chapel in Paris.

She painted well, but the St. Ursula progressed but slowly.

When she was alone she would let her palette fall to her side and sit thinking; and the bells would ring across the waters till she hated them.

What was the use of painting a St. Ursula? St. Ursula did not want to be painted; and all art was nothing but repetition: nobody had found out anything in colour really, since Giotto, though to be sure he could not paint transparencies or reflections. And she would leave her St. Ursula impatiently, and read Cavalcaselle and Zugler and Winckelmann and Rumohr and Passavant, and when she did go out would go to some little remote, unvisited chapel and sit for hours before some dim disputed fresco.

She would be in London next week, in its blaze of gas, jewels, luxury, and political discussion; she said that she liked these calm, dusky, silent places, alone with S. Louis and S. Giles and S. Jerome.

Madame Mila puzzled over her conduct in vain. She did not dare to ask anything, because there were those sixty thousand francs, and her cousin had helped her about them, and you cannot say very intrusive or im-

pertinent things to a person who is lending you money; but it was very odd, thought Madame Mila incessantly, because she evidently was unhappy about the man, and wanted him, and yet must have sent him away. Of course she couldn't have married him; but still there were ways of managing everything; and in Hilda's position she really could do as she liked, and nobody ever would even have said a word.

Of course she would not have married him; that Madame Mila knew; but Society would have made no objection to his being about her always like her courier and her pug and the rest of her following; and if Society doesn't object to a thing, why on earth should you not do it?

Il ne faut pas être plus royaliste que le roi: there cannot be the slightest necessity to be more scrupulous than the people that are round you; indeed, to attempt to be more so is to be disagreeable and tacitly impertinent to others.

There is a certain latitude, which taken, makes you look much more amiable. Madame Mila was kissed on both cheeks really with sincerity by many ladies in many cities, merely because her nice management of her Maurice made their Maurices easier for them, and their pleasant consciousness of her frailty was the one touch which made them all akin. Polyandry made easy is a great charm in Society—there is no horrid scandal for any one, and no fuss at all: Monsieur is content and Madame enjoys herself, everybody goes everywhere, and everything is as it should be.

"If that old man had lived, Hilda would have been

glad to be like every one else," Madame Mila thought, with much impatience. "Of course, because she is quite free, she don't care a bit to use her freedom."

Madame Mila herself felt that although her passion for Maurice was the fifty-sixth passion of her soul, and the most ardent of all her existence, that even Maurice himself would have lost some of his attraction if he had lost the pleasant savour of incorrectness that attached to him, and if she had not had to take all those precautions about his going to another hotel, etc., etc., which enabled her to hold her place in courts and embassies, and made her friends all able to say with clear consciences, "Nothing in it, oh *dear!* nothing in it whatever!" Not that she cared about any one believing that there was nothing in it; she did not even wish anybody to believe it; she only wanted it said—that was all; because, whilst it can be said, a woman "goes everywhere" still, and though Heloise or Francesca may be willing to "lose the world for love," the Femme Galante has no notion of doing anything of the sort.

"She must have refused him?" the Duc de St. Louis said to her more than once, harassed by chagrin at the failure of his project, and by a curiosity which his good breeding forbade him to seek to satisfy at the fountain head.

"Oh, I dare say she did," said Madame Mila. "Of course she did. But if she care for him, why should she send him away?—il y a des moyens pour tout. They are *brouillés* somehow, that is certain. Oh, yes—certain! He was here when Hilda came back, and we passed him one day in the street, and he took off his hat and bowed, and looked very cold and pale and went on-

wards; and he has never called once. Now you know he is gone to the Marshes, and after that they say he is going into Sicily to see after that brigand Pibro. It is not like an Italian to be so soon repulsed."

"It is very like an Italian to be too proud to ask twice," said the Duc, and added with a little smile, "He never said anything to me. Only once lately he said that he was sure that Miladi would be a very different creature if she had home interests and children!"

"Good gracious!" said Madame Mila, "she was quite right to have nothing to do with him if he have that kind of ideas. How little he knows her too! Hilda is quite unnatural about children; quite horrid; she never speaks to them; and when she saw my dear little Lili dressed as Madame l'Archiduc for the babies' fancy ball at the Elysée, what do you think she said?—she told me that I polluted the child's brain before it could distinguish right from wrong, and that a mixture of Judic and Fashion at five years old was disgusting; and Lili looked lovely!—she was so prettily rouged, and Maurice had given her a necklace of pink pearls. But Hilda has no human feeling at all."

"Della Rocca did not think so," said the Duc.

"Della Rocca was in love," said Madame Mila scornfully, "with the beaux yeaux de sa cassette too;—as well. They may only have quarrelled, you know. Hilda is very disagreeable and difficult. By the way, Deutschland went after her to Rome, and proposed to her again."

"Indeed! and she refused him again?"

"Oh, yes. She refuses them all. I did fancy she was touched by Della Rocca, but you see it came to nothing; she is as cold as a crystal. She likes to know

that heaps of men are wretched about her, and she likes to study those dingy old paintings, and that is about all she does like, or ever will like. She will be very unhappy as she grows older, and I dare say she will be quite capable of leaving all her money away from her family to build a cathedral, or found a School of Art."

And Madame Mila, impatient, nodded to the Duc, and dashed away in the victoria behind the white and black liveries. She was managing to enjoy her Lent after all: her mind being at rest about those sixty thousand francs, there was no occasion to be so very rigid; low bodices she did not wear, because she was a woman of her word; but then she had half a hundred divine confections, cut square, or adorned with ruffs, or open *en cœur* with loveliest lace and big bouquets of roses, to make that form of renunciation simpler; there was plenty going on, and little "sauteries," which nobody could call balls, and pleasant gatherings, quite harmless, because only summoned for "music," and altogether, what with the oasis of mi-Carême, and the prolongation of the carnival in Russian houses, life was very endurable; and there were Neapolitan oysters to fast upon comfortably. Heaven tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and it would be hard if Society did not soften penitence to the Femme Galante.

The Lady Hilda did keep her Lent, and kept it strictly, and was never seen at the "sauteries," and rarely at the musical parties. But then every one knew that she was *dévote* (when she was not slightly Voltairean), and it could not be expected that a woman going to reign in the vast world of London would put herself out to be amiable in Floralia. Yet, had they only

known it, she loved Floralia in her own heart as she had never loved any other place upon earth. The beautiful small city set along its shining waters, with all the grace of its classic descent, its repose of contemplative art, its sanctity of imperishable greatness, had a hold upon her that no other spot under the sun could ever gain. If she thought others unworthy of it, she thought herself no less unworthy. It seemed to her that, to be worthy to dwell in it, one needed to be wise and pure and half divine, even as St. Ursula herself.

And all the pride in her was shaken to the roots: she was full of a restless, dissatisfied humility; there were times when she hated herself, and was weary of herself to utter impatience. She shut herself up with her art studies and the old frescoes, because they pained her less than any other thing. She was passionately unhappy: though to other people she only seemed a trifle more cynical and more contemptuous than before, no more.

The easy morality with which her cousin would have solved all difficulty, was not possible to her. She would not have cheated the old dead man from whom her riches came, by evading him in the spirit of his will, whilst adhering to the letter. Unless she gave up her riches, her lover could be nothing to her: and the thought of giving them up never even occurred to her as possible. She did not know it, because she was so very tired of so many things; but the great world she had always lived in was very necessary to her, and had absolute dominion over her; it became tiresome, as the trammels of empire do to a monarch; but to lay down her sceptre would have been an abdication, and an abnegation, impossible to her. And she despised herself because they were impos-

sible; despised herself because to his generosity she had only responded with what at best was but a vulgar egotism; despised herself because she had been so weak that she had permitted his familiarities and his caresses unrebuked; despised herself for everything with that self-scorn of a proud woman, which is far more intense and bitter than any scorn that she has ever dealt out upon others.

She had lived all her life on a height of unconscious but no less absorbing, self-admiration. She had looked down on all the aims and objects and attainments and possessions of all other persons with a bland and superb vanity; she had been accustomed to regard herself as perfect, as others all united to tell her that she was; and her immunity from mean frailties and puerile emotions had given her a belief that she was lifted high above the passions and the follies of humankind; now, all of a sudden, she had dropped to the lowest depths of weakness and of selfishness—passion had touched her, yet had left her without its courage.

In those long, lonely, studious days in Lent, studying her religious art with wandering thoughts, she grew to hate herself; yet, to resign her empire for another's sake never even distantly appeared to her as possible.

One day, in a little private chapel, where there were some fine dim works in tempera, only to be seen by earliest morning light, she was startled by seeing him near her; he was coming from the sacristy on business of the church; he looked at her quickly, and would have passed on with a silent salutation, but she approached him on an impulse which a moment later she regretted.

"Need you avoid me?" she said, hurriedly. "Surely

—I go from here so soon—we might still be friends? People would talk less——"

He looked down on her with a cold severity which chilled her, like the passing of an icy wind.

"Madame," he answered her, with a fleeting smile, "your northern lover, perhaps, may have been content to accept such a position. I am, I confess, thankless. I thought you too proud to heed what 'people said'; but if that trouble you—I go myself to Sicily tomorrow."

Then he bowed very low once more, and, with his salutation to the altar, went on his way through the dusky shadows of the little chapel out into the morning sunshine of the street.

Her eyes grew blind with tears, and she sank down before a wooden bench upon her knees; yet could not pray there for the bitterness and tumult of her heart.

She found her master in him.

His passionate unpardoning gaze sank into her very soul, and seemed like a ruthless light, that showed her all the wretchedness of pride and self-love and vainest ostentations, which she had harboured there and set up as her gods.

She comprehended that she had wronged him, and that he would not forgive. After all—knowing what she knew, she had no right to deal with him as she had done. She had allowed him to bask in the sun of a fool's paradise; and then had awakened him rudely, and had sent him adrift. She had been ungenerous: she saw it, and hated her own fault with the repentance of a generous temper. She had gone through the world with but little heed for the pain of others; but his pain smote her conscience. After all, he had a title to upbraid her pas-

sionately; that he refrained from doing so made her own self-reproach the keener. There had been so many moments when with justice he might have felt certain that she loved him: and how could he guess the rest? She knew that she had wronged him; and she was humbled in her own sight; she had lost her own self-respect, and her own motives seemed to her but poor, and almost base.

No amorous entreaty, no feverish pursuit of her, had ever moved her so intensely as that silent condemnation, as that contemptuous rejection, of her poor half-hearted overture of peace.

When she left the chapel she loved him as she had never done before; yet it never occurred to her to abandon her riches for his sake. The habits and the ways of the world were too close about her; its artificial needs and imperious demands were too entirely her second nature; its admiration was too necessary to her, and her custom of deference to its conventional laws too much an instinct; she had been too long accustomed to regard the impulses of the heart as insane follies, and poverty of life as pain and madness.

The same evening he did leave the town for Sicily, where he had lands which, though beautiful, were utterly unproductive, and constantly harried by the system of brigandage, which paralyzed the district. "He will get shot most likely. He has declared that he will not return without having captured Pibro," said an Italian in her hearing, at a musical gathering, dedicated to the music of Pergolese. Pibro was a notorious Sicilian robber. The sweet chords sounded very harsh and jangled in her ears; she left early, and went home and took a

heavy dose of chloral, which only gave her dark and dreary dreams.

"What miserable creatures we are!" she thought, wearily. "We cannot even sleep naturally—poor people can sleep;—they lie on hard benches, and dream with smiles on their faces."

She got up and looked out at the moonlight on the river, and walked to and fro her chamber; a lofty, slender, white figure in the pale gleam of the lamp-rays.

A passionate, feverish, disordered pain consumed her. It terrified her. Would it be thus weeks, months, years —all her life?

"Perhaps it is the chloral that unnerves one," she thought; "I will not take it any more."

"Only fancy, ma chère," said Madame Mila to her next morning, with the pretty cat-like cruelty of the Mila species, "only fancy—that poor dear Della Rocca is gone to his death in Sicily. So they say. There is a horrid brigand who has been hanging some of his farmers there to trees, and burning their cottages, Della Rocca's farmers, you know; and he is gone to see about it, and to capture the wretched creature,—as if he could when all the soldiers and all the police have failed! He will be quite certain to be shot; isn't it a pity? He is so handsome, and if he would marry that little American Spiffler girl with all her millions he might be very happy. That little Spiffler is really not unpresentable, and her people will give the largest dot ever heard of if they can get one of the very old titles; and they will make no difficulty about religion; they were Jumpers or Shakers or something themselves; he might send her to the Sacré Cœur for a year or two."

"If he be gone to be shot, what use would the Spiffler dot be?" said Lady Hilda, with coolest calm, as on a subject not even of most remote interest, and she went on glazing a corner of the draperies of her St. Ursula with carmine.

"The marriage was proposed to him, I know," continued Madame Mila, unheeded. "The Featherleighs undertook it, but he refused point-blank. *'Je ne me vends pas,'* was all he said. It was very rude, and really that little Spiffler might be made something of: those very tiny creatures never look vulgar, and are so easy to dress; as it is, I dare say Fürstenberg will take her, if Nina will let him; it is on the tapis, and Della Rocca won't come back alive, I suppose—isn't it a hare-brained thing to do?—there are gendarmes to look after the brigands, but it seems he has some fancy because they were his own people that suffered—but no doubt he told you all about it, as you and he are such friends."

"He merely said he was going to Sicily," said the Lady Hilda, languidly, still glazing her St. Ursula.

Madame Mila eyed her curiously.

"You look very pale, dear; I think you paint too much, and read too much," she said, affectionately. "I wish you had tried to persuade him into this Spiffler affair; it would be just the marriage for him, and a girl of seventeen may be drilled into anything, especially when she has small bones and little colour and good teeth; if Fürstenberg gets her he will soon train her into good form—only he will gamble away all her money, let them tie it up as they may; and they can't tie it up very much if they want to make a high marriage. Good men won't sacrifice themselves unless they get some con-

rol of the fortune. They wouldn't have tied it at all vith Della Rocca. Wouldn't the little Spiffler have been etter for him than Sicily?"

"It depends upon taste," said the Lady Hilda, chang- ng her brushes.

"Very odd taste," said Madame Mila. "They say ?ibro always cuts the heads off the men he takes, and ends them into Palermo—the heads, you know—with emons in their mouths like boars; isn't it horrible? And Della Rocca intends going up after the monster in his ery fastnesses upon the mountains! Fancy that beau- iful head of his!—— Really, dear, you do look very ll: when will you go to London?"

"Oh, some time next week."——

She went to the window and opened it; the room wam round her, the sounds of the streets grew dull upon er ears.

"I wish you wouldn't go till after the races," said Madame Mila, placidly. "I mean to stay. The place s really very nice, though one does see the same people oo often. Fancy poor Paolo ending like John the Baptist—the head in the charger, you know—I wonder ou let him go, for you had a great deal of influence over im, and say what you like, the Spiffler girl would have een better. How can you keep that window open, with he tramontana blowing?—thanks so much for lending ne the horses—goodness! what is the matter?"

Madame Mila paused frightened; for the first time n all her life Lady Hilda, leaning against the strong orth wind, had lost her consciousness and had fainted.

"How very strange people are!" thought Madame Mila, when an hour later her cousin had recovered her-

self, and had attributed her weakness to the chloral at night and the scent of her oil paints. "If she cared for him like that, why didn't she keep him when she had got him?—she might have hung him to her skirt like her châtelaine; nobody would ever have said anything; I do begin to think that with all her taste, and all her cleverness, she has, after all, not so very much savoir faire."

No one had much savoir faire to Madame Mila's mind who did not manage always to enjoy themselves without scruples and also without scenes.

The house in London was ordered to be kept ready night and day, but no one went to occupy it. M. Camille Odissôt, stimulated by dread of his patroness's daily arrival in Paris, worked marvels of celerity upon the ball-room walls, and drew with most exquisite precision bands of Greek youths and maidens in the linked mazes of the dance, but none went to admire his efforts and execution. No fashionable newspapers announced the Lady Hilda's arrival in either city; she stayed on and on in Floralia.

"When I know that he is safe out of Sicily I will go," she said to herself; and let the piles of letters and invitation cards lie and accumulate as they would.

She ceased to paint, and left the St. Ursula unfinished he had sketched it out for her on the panel, and had first tinted it en grisaille. She had not the courage to go on with it; she changed her mode of life, and rode or drove all the day long in the sweet fresh spring weather When she was not in the open air she felt suffocated The danger which he ran was no mere exaggeration of her cousin's malicious inventiveness, but was a fact, tru

and ghastly enough; no one heard of or from him, but his friends said that it was the most fatal madness that had led him to risk his life in the fastnesses of the Sicilian thieves.

"It is sheer suicide," they said around her. "What had he to do there?—if the law cannot enforce itself, leave it alone in its impotency. But he had some idea that because his own villages were amongst those who suffered most, it was his place to go there and do what the law cannot do:—he was always Quixotic, poor Paolo. The last thing heard of him was that he had left Palermo with an escort of men whom he had chosen and paid himself, and had gone up towards the mountains. His dead body will be the first tidings that we have; the monster Pibro has spies in all directions, and holds that district in a perfect reign of terror."

She went out into Society as Easter came, and heard all that they said, and gave no sign of what she suffered. Worth sent her new marvels of the spring, and she wore them, and was endlessly courted and envied, and quoted and wondered at. She was a little chillier and more cynical than ever, and women observed with pleasure that she was looking ill and growing too thin, which would spoil her beauty. That was all. But she had never thought such pain possible in life as she endured now.

"If he die it is I who will have killed him," she said in her own heart night and day.

Once she found herself in her long lonely rides near Palestrina, and met the old steward, and recognized him, and went into the sad, silent, deserted house and listened to the old man's stories of his beloved lord's boyhood and

manhood, and of the people's clinging feudal attachment to him, and of his devotion to them in the time of the cholera pestilence.

"There is not an old charcoal burner or a little goatherd on the estates that would not give his life for Prince Paolo," the steward said to her, crying like a child because there was no news from Sicily.

The same evening she went to a great Pasqua ball at the Trasimene villa. As they fastened the diamonds over her hair and in her bosom she felt to hate the shining, senseless, soulless stones;—they were the emblem of the things for which she had lost him; and at that very hour, for aught they knew, he might be lying dead on some solitary shore by the fair blue sea of Theocritus!

With a heart sick with terror and uncertainty she went to the brilliant crowds of the Trasimene house; to the talk that was so frivolous and tedious, to the dances she never joined in, to the homage she was so tired of, to the monotonies and personalities and trivialities that make up society.

M. de St. Louis hurried up to her:

"Madame, quelle chance!—our new Herakles has slain his Dragon. Maremma has just had telegrams from Palermo. Della Rocca has positively captured the scoundrel Pibro, and taken him into the city, much wounded, but alive, and in the king's gaol by this time. A fine thing to have done, is it not? Of course we shall all praise it, since it has succeeded; although, in truth, a madder exploit never was attempted. Paolo was ten days in the mountains living on a few beans and berries; he has received no hurt whatever; I should think they will give him the Grand Cordon of the Santissima An-

nunziata. It is really a superb thing to have done. The monster has been the terror of that district for ten years. Palermo went utterly mad with joy. It is quite a pity there is no Ariosto to celebrate such a feat. It is very Ariosto-like. Indeed, all the best Italians are so. Englishmen have long ceased to be in any manner Shakespearean; but Italians remain like their poets."

The Duc wandered away into the subtlest and most discursive analysis of the Ariostian school and of the national characteristics which it displayed and was nurtured on; but she had no ear to hear it.

Outwardly she sat indifferent and calm, but her brain and her heart were in tumult with the sweetest, loftiest, grandest pride that she had ever known—pride without egotism, without vanity, without a thought of self; true pride, exultant in heroism, not the arrogant pride of self-culture, of self-worship, of self-love, not the paltry pride of rank and acquisition and physical perfection, not the pride of which all the while she had been half contemptuous herself. And then—his life was safe!

Yet, had he stood before her then she must have given him the same answer—at least, she thought so.

"What a fine thing to have done!" said Madame Mila, pausing by her in the middle of a waltz, with her brocade train ablaze with gold. "And now he can come back and marry the Spiffler girl. What do you say, Duc?"

"He will never marry la petite Spiffler," said the Duc; "nor any one else," he added, with a glance of meaning at Lady Hilda.

All eyes turned upon her. She played idly with her fan—one painted long ago by Watteau.

"M. della Rocca has succeeded, so it is heroism," she said, calmly. "Had he failed, I suppose it would have been foolhardiness."

"Of course," said the Duc. "Surely, Madame, Failure cannot expect to use the same dictionary as Success?"

"He must have the Santissima Annunziata, and marry the big Spiffler dot," said Madame Mila.

"Nay, Comtesse, that were bathos indeed, to make la petite Spiffler *cousine du roi!* Anyhow, let us rejoice that he is living, and that the old Latin race is still productive of heroes. I suppose we shall have details the day after tomorrow."

"Whatever could he do it for?" said Madame Mila as she whirled away again in the encircling arm of her Maurice: to Madame Mila such trifles as duty, patriotism, or self-sacrifice could not possibly be any motive power amongst rational creatures. "Whatever could he do it for?—I suppose to soften Hilda. But he must know very little about her; she hates anything romantic you heard she called it foolhardy. He *never* will be anything to her, not if he try for ten years. She cares about him after her fashion, but she cares much more about herself."

Lady Hilda did not sleep that night.

She did not even lie down; dry-eyed and with fever in her veins, she sat by the window watching the bright pale gold of the morning widen over the skies, and the sea-green depth of the river catch the first sun-rays and mirror them.

She was so proud of him—ah, Heaven, so proud! The courage of her temper answered to the courage of his

action. It was Heraklean—it was Homeric—that going forth single-handed to do what the law could not or would not do, and set free from tyranny of brute force those poor tillers of the soil who could not help themselves. The very folly and madness of that utter disregard of peril moved her to reverence; she who had all her life been environed with the cool, calm, cautious, and circumspect customs of the world.

For one moment it seemed to her possible to renounce everything for his sake. For one moment her own passion for the mere gauds and pomps and possessions of the world looked to her beside the simplicity and self-sacrifice of his own life so poor and mean that she shrank from it in disgust. For one moment she said to herself —"Love was enough."

He had been ready to give up his life for a few poor labourers, who had no other claim on him than that they lived upon the soil he owned; and she who loved him had not the courage to renounce mere worldly riches for his sake. She hated herself, and yet she could not change herself. She cared for power, for supremacy, for indulgence, for extravagance; she dreaded to hear the tittering mockery of the women she had eclipsed so long at her present weakness; it was all so poor, so base, so unworthy, yet it enchained her: the world had been her religion; no one casts off a creed long held without hard and cruel strife.

"Oh, my love, how far beneath you I am!" she thought, she whose pride had been a by-word, and whose superb vanity had been an invulnerable armour.

She could have kneeled down and kissed his hands for very humility; yet she could not resolve to yield.

"I might see him once more, before I go," she thought and so coward-like she put the hour of decision from her. They must part, but she might see him once more first.

She would go away of course, and her life in the Winter City would be with the things of the past, and she would grow used to the pain of dead passion, and feel it less with time—other women did, and why not she?

So she said to herself; and yet at moments a sort of despair appalled her: what would her future be? Only one long empty void, in whose hollowness the "pleasures" of the world would rattle like dead bones. She began to understand that for a great love there is no death possible. It is like Ahasuerus the Jew: it must live on in torment for ever.

And how she had smiled at all these things when others had spoken of them!

The days passed slowly one by one; the beautiful city was in its spring glory, and ran over with the blossoms of flowers, as though it were the basket that Persephone let fall. The news-sheets were full of this deed which he had done in Sicily; she bought them all, down to the tawdriest little sheet that held his name, and read the well-known story again and again a hundred and ten hundred times; his friends expected him to arrive in the town each day, but no one heard anything direct from himself.

"It is strange he writes to none of us," said Maremma "can anything have happened?"

"Oh, no; the papers would know it," said the Duc de St. Louis.

She overheard them, and listened with dry lips and a beating heart.

Why did he write to no one? The news-sheets had announced that he had left Palermo for Floralia.

"He may be coming back by the marshes," some one else suggested; "he is reclaiming land there."

Perhaps he stayed away, she thought, because he had heard that she still remained in his native city.

It was mid-April. Madame Mila was organizing picnics under old Etruscan walls, and alfresco dinners in villa gardens, and she and her kind were driving out on the tops of drags, and playing baccarat upon anemone-studded lawns by moonlight, and driving in again, at or after midnight, singing Offenbach choruses, and going to the big Café in the town for supper and champagnes; be it in winter or summer, spring or autumn, town or country, youth or middle-age, Madame Mila and her kind contrive to make no difference in their manner of life whatever; they would sing Schneider's songs in the Tombs of the Prophets, they would eat lobster salad on Mount Olivet, and they would scatter their cigar ash over Vaucluse, Marathon, the Campo Santo, or the grave at Ravenna with equal indifference; they are always amused, and defy alike the seasons and the sanctities to stop them in their amusement.

It was mid-April, and with the beginning of May would come the races, and with the races the Winter City would become the Summer City, and the winter-fashion always fled with one bound to fresh fields and pastures new, and left the town to silence, sunshine, roses, fruits, its own populace with their summer songs and summer skies, and perhaps here and there an artist or a poet, or some such foolish person, who loved it best so in its solitude.

"Do come with us, Hilda," said Madame Mila one mid-April morning.

Madame Mila was attired in the simplest morning costume of cream-hued Sicilienne covered with écru lace, and she had a simple country Dorothy hat of cream-coloured velvet, lined *bleu-de-ciel,* with wreaths of delicate nemophilæ and convolvuli and floating feathers, set on one side of her head; Lancret might have painted her on a fan, or Fragonard on a cabinet; she was just going to drive out with five carriages full of her friends to a picnic at Guido Salvareo's villa; they were to dine there, play lansquenet there, and come back in the small hours; they had all postillions, silk-jacketed, powdered, and with ribboned straw hats; the horses were belled, and the bells were jingling in the street; Madame Mila was in the most radiant spirits; she had won five hundred napoleons the night before, and had them all to adventure over again tonight.

"Do come with us, Hilda," she urged. "You do nothing but go those stupid long drives by yourself; it is very bad for you; and it will be charming today; Salvareo has such taste; it is really quite romantic to sit upon those anemones, and have the goats come and stare at you; and he always does things so well, and his cook is so good. Do come with us: I am sure it would do you good."

Lady Hilda looked up from the S. Ursula, which she was finishing:

"My dear Mila!—you know perfectly well how I detest that kind of thing. Teresa's songs, drag seats, and eager efforts to imitate the worst kind of women!—go to it, if it amuses you; but, with all gratitude, allow me to decline."

"How disagreeable you are!" said Madame Mila, pettishly. "One must do something with oneself all these long days: if it were Palestrina, I suppose you would go."

Lady Hilda deigned to give no reply. She touched in the gold background of her Saint. Madame Mila looked at her with irritation; no one likes to be despised, and she knew that her cousin did very nearly despise her, and all the ways and means of enjoyment in which her heart delighted.

Lady Hilda, tranquilly painting there, annoyed her inexpressibly. Why should any woman be above the box-seats of drags and all their concomitant attractions?

She took her revenge.

"Do as you like of course, but you always *do* do that," she said carelessly. "There are two seats vacant. St. Louis and Carlo Maremma were to have gone with us, but they went to Della Rocca instead. Oh, didn't you know it?—he reached Palestrina two days ago very ill with marsh fever. It is fever and cholera and ague and all sorts of dreadful things all together. Isn't it odd? —to have escaped all that danger in Sicily, and then get this in the swamps coming back? Nobody knew it till late last night, when his steward got frightened, and sent in for the physicians. He is very bad, I believe—not likely to live. You know they go down under that —sometimes in twenty-four hours."

Lady Hilda seemed to reach her at a single step, though the distance of the room was between them.

"Is that true?—or is it some jest?"

Madame Mila, appalled, looked up into her face.

"It is true, quite true. Oh, Hilda, take your hand

off; you hurt me. How could I tell you would care about it like that."

"Is it true?" muttered her cousin again.

"Indeed, indeed it is," she whimpered trembling. "Oh, let me go, you spoil my lace. If you cared for the man like that, why didn't you keep him when you had got him? I know you could not have married him, but nobody would have said anything."

Lady Hilda put her out into the corridor, and closed the door and locked it within.

Madame Mila, frightened, astonished, and outraged, went down to her Maurice, and the drag, and the rib-boned and powdered postillions, and the horses with their jingling bells and plaited tails; the gay cavalcade rattled off along the river-street towards the city gates as the clocks tolled three.

Lady Hilda and St. Ursula were left alone.

Within less than half-an-hour the black horses were harnessed and bore their mistress towards Palestrina. Never before moved by impulse, impulse alone governed her now; the impulse of despair and remorse. She cared nothing who saw her or who knew; for once she had forgotten herself.

The long drive seemed eternity; she thought the steep winding mountain roads would never end; when Palestrina came in sight, pale and stately against its dark background of forest trees, she felt as if her heart would break. He had gone through all those perils afar off, only to be dying there!

It was five o'clock by the convent chimes when they reached the crest of the hill on which the old place

stood. The lovely hillside was covered with the blue and white of the wild hyacinths and gold of the wild daffodils. The lofty stone pines spread their dark green roofs above her head. Flocks of birds were singing, in the myrtle thickets, their sweet shrill evensong. The shining valley lay below like a cloud of amber light. The surpassing loveliness, the intense stillness of it all, made the anguish within her unbearable. What she had missed all her life long!——

There was a chapel not far from the house set in the midst of the pines, with the cross on its summit touching the branches, and its doorway still hung round with the evergreens and flowers of its passed Easter feasts. There were men and women and children standing about on the turf in front of it; they were most of them crying bitterly.

She stopped her horses there, and called a woman to her, but her lips would not frame the question. The woman guessed it:—

"Yes, my beautiful lady," she said, with many tears. "We have been praying for Prince Paolo. He is very ill, up yonder. The marsh sickness has got him. May the dear Mother of God save him to us. But he is dying, they say——"

"We would die in his stead, if the good God would let us," said one of the men, drawing near: the others sobbed aloud.

She put out her hand to the man—the slender, proud hand that she had refused to princes. Wondering, he fell on his knee and would have kissed her hand. She drew back in horror.

"Do not kneel to me! I have killed him!" she muttered; and she urged her panting horses forward to the house.

She bade them tell the Duc de St. Louis to come to her upon the terrace. She leaned there tearless, white as death, still as marble; the beautiful, tranquil springtime all around, and the valley shining like gold in the light of the descending sun. It seemed to her that ages passed before the soft step of her old friend sounded near her: he was surprised and startled, but he did not show it.

"There is still hope," he hastened to say, ere she could speak. "Within the last hour he is slightly better; they give him quinine constantly. If the chills and shivering do not return, it is just possible that he may live. But——"

His voice faltered in its serenity, and he turned his head away.

"It is not likely?"

Her own voice had scarcely any sound of its natural tone left in it, yet long habit was so strong with her that she spoke calmly.

"It is not likely. This deadly marsh-poison is short and fierce. After the fatigue and fasting in Sicily it has taken fearful hold on him. But in an hour or two they will know—one way or the other."

"I will stay here. Come and tell me—often. And if—if the worst come—let me see him. Leave me now."

He looked at her, hesitated, then left her as she asked. He guessed all that passed in her thoughts; all that had gone before: and he knew that she was not a woman who

would bear pity, and that she was best left thus in solitude.

Like a caged animal she paced to and fro the long length of the stone terrace.

She was all alone.

The flower-like radiance of the declining day shone everywhere around, the birds sang, the dreamy bells rang in the Ave Maria from hill to hill, all was so still, so peaceful, so beautiful; yet with the setting of the sun, his life might go out in darkness.

In her great misery, her soul was purified. The fire that consumed her burned away the dross of the world, the alloy of selfishness and habit and vain passions. "O God! give me his life, and I will give him mine!" she cried in her heart all through those terrible hours; and yet recoiled in terror from the uselessness and daring of her prayer. What had she ever done that she could merit its fulfilment?

He might have been hers, all hers; and she had loved the base things of a worldly greatness better than himself. And now he lay dying there, as the sun dropped westward and night came.

She felt no chill of evening. She felt neither hunger nor thirst. Crowds of weeping people hung about in the gardens below. She heard nothing that passed round her, save the few words of her old friend, when from time to time he came and told her that there was no change.

The moon rose, and its light fell on the stone of the terrace, and through the vast deserted chambers opening from it; on the grey worn marbles of the statues, and on the pale angels of the frescoes.

It was ten o'clock: the chimes of the convent above on the mountains told every hour. Unceasingly she paced to and fro, to and fro, like some mad, or wounded creature. The silence and serenity of the night, the balmy fragrance of it, and the silvery light, were so much mockery of her wretchedness. She had never thought that there could be agony like this—and yet from heaven no sign!

Nearly another hour had passed before her friend approached her again. She caught the sound of his step in the darkness; her heart stood still; her blood was changed to ice, frozen with the deadliness of the most deadly fear on earth; she could only look at him with wide-opened, strained, blind eyes.

For the first time he smiled:—

"Take comfort," he said, softly. "He has fallen asleep, he is less exhausted, they say that he may live. How cold you are!—this night will kill you!"

She dropped down upon her knees on the stone pavement, and all her bowed frame was shakened by convulsive weeping.

He drew aside in reverence and left her alone in the light of the moon.

When midnight came hope was certain.

The sleep still lasted; the fever had abated, the cold chills had not returned.

She called her old friend to her out into the terrace.

"I will go now. Send to me at daybreak and keep my secret."

"May I tell him nothing?"

"Tell him to come to me—when he is able."

"Nothing more?"

"No; nothing. He will know——"

"But——"

She turned her face to him in the full moonlight, with the tears of her joy coursing down her cheeks, and he started at the change in her that this one night of suffering had wrought.

"No, say nothing more. But—but—you shall see what my atonement shall be, and my thankfulness."

Then she went away from him softly in the darkness and the fragrance of the April night. The Duc looked after the lights of her carriage with a mist over his own eyes, but he shrugged his shoulders with a sigh.

"Who can ever say that he knows a woman! Who can ever predict what she will not say, or will not do, or will not be!" he murmured, as he turned and went within to watch beside the bed of his friend, as the stars grew clearer and the dawn approached.

CHAPTER XIII

A MONTH later Paolo della Rocca led his wife through what had once been his mother's chambers at Palestrina, and which were now prepared for her, with all their wide windows unclosed and looking out to the rose and golden afternoon glories of the bright southwest.

In the little oratory, which opened out of the bedchamber, there was hung an altar picture; it was the picture of San Cipriano il Mago.

"Take it as my marriage gift," he murmured to her. "You threw away your magic wand and renounced the world for me,—oh, my love, my love! God grant you the Saints' reward!"

She laid her hands upon his heart, and leant her cheek upon them.

"My reward is here."

"And you will never repent?"

"Did Cyprian repent when he broke his earthly bonds and gained eternal life? Once I was blind, but now I see. The world is nothing:—Love is enough!"

CHAPTER XIV

"C'EST étonnant!" murmured the Duc de St. Louis the same evening softly to himself, standing on the steps of the Hôtel Murat, after assisting in the morning at those various civil ceremonies and impediments with which our beloved Italy, in her new character as a nation of Free Thought, does her best to impede and deter all such as cling to so old-world and pedantic a prejudice as marriage.

The dénouement of the drama which he himself had first set in action had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt. He had had no conception of what would happen. He had thought to enrich his friend by one of the finest fortunes in Europe, and lo!—the Duc remained in an amazement and a sense of humiliation from which he could not recover.

"C'est étonnant!" he murmured again and again. "Who would ever have believed that Miladi was a woman to beggar herself and play the romance of the 'world lost for love'? If I had only imagined—if I had only dreamed! I will never propose a marriage to any living being again; never."

"You have nothing to be so remorseful about, Duc," said Lord Clairvaux, with a sigh, himself utterly exhausted by all the law work that he had been obliged to go through. "It is very funny certainly—she of all women in the world! But they are happy enough, and

he really is the only living creature that ever could manage her. If anybody had ever told me that any man would change Hilda like that!"

"Happy!" echoed M. de St. Louis, with his delicate and incredulous smile. He was a man who had no delusions; he was perfectly aware that there were no marriages that were happy; some were calm, this was the uttermost, and to remain calm required an immense income; money alone was harmony.

Lord Clairvaux lighted a very big cigar, and grumbled that it had been horrible to have to leave England in the Epsom month, but that he thanked goodness that it was the last of her caprices that he would be worried with; and he hoped that this Italian would like them when he had had a year or two of them.

"I don't know, though, but what it is the only sensible caprice she ever did have in her life; eh?" he added; "except buying Escargot and giving him to me after the races—you remember?—Hang it, I've never seen such a Chantilly before or since as that was!"

"We never do see such a race as the one that we happen to win," murmured M. de St. Louis.

"Of course it's an awful cropper to take, and all that; but I'm not sure but what she's done a wise thing, though all the women are howling at her like mad," continued Lord Clairvaux; "a woman can't live for ever on *chiffons*, you see."

"Most women can—admirably. They buy at eighty as much white hair, the coiffeurs tell me, as they buy blonde or black at twenty."

"Ah, but they can't, if they have a bit of heart or mind in them. Hilda has both."

"The case is so rare I could not prescribe for it—let us hope Miladi's own prescription will suit her," said the Duc, whose serene good-humour was still slightly ruffled.

"Well, she always was all extremes and contraries," said Lord Clairvaux. "You never could say one minute what she wouldn't do the next. By George! you know there is nothing too odd for her to go in for; I should not wonder an atom if when we come here two or three years hence, we find her worshipping a curly Paolino, seeing to the silkworms, and studying wine-making: she's really tried everything else, you know."

"Everything except happiness? Well, very few of us get any chance of trying that, or would appreciate it if we did get it. Happiness," pursued the Duc pensively, "must, after all, be almost as monotonous as discontent —when one is used to it. It is comforting to think so; for there is very little of it. I cannot realize Miladi amongst the babies and the wine-presses; but you may be right."

"Well, you know she's tried everything else," repeated Lord Clairvaux. "It will be like Julius Caesar and his cabbage-garden."

"You mean Diocletian," said the Duc. "Do you leave tonight? We may as well go as far as Paris together."

And he turned back into the hotel to bid farewell to Madame Mila.

Madame Mila,—who had made the religious and civil ceremonies gorgeous in the last new anomalous anachronisms, with a classic and clinging dress, quite Greek in its cut, covered all over with the eyes out of peacocks'

feathers, and a cotte de maille bodice, stiff as pasteboard, with gold and silver embroideries,—was now on the point of departure from the Winter City across the Mont Cenis, and was covered up in the most wonderful of hooded cloaks trimmed with the feathers of the Russian diver and the grebe; about one hundred and fifty birds, happy, peaceful, and innocent under their native skies, had died to trim the wrap, and it would probably be worn about half-a-dozen times; for feathers are so very soon tumbled, as everybody knows.

"They are quite mad, both of them!" said the little lady, giving her small fingers in adieu, and turning to see that Maurice had all the things she wanted, and was duly hooking them on to her ceinture of oxidized silver.

She travelled with her two maids, a courier, and a footman, but none of them did as much hard work as the indefatigable Maurice.

"Perhaps, Madame," said the Duc, who indeed thought so himself, but was not going to admit it too strongly of two persons who, despite their lamentable weakness, remained his favourites. "But if a few people were not mad occasionally there would be no chance for the sanity of the world."

"Well, they will repent horribly, that is one comfort; she most of all," said Madame Mila, with asperity. "She ought to have been prevented; treated for lunacy, you know; in France they would have managed it at once with a conseil de famille. Maurice, you are screwing the top of that flacon on all wrong—do take more care! She will repent horribly, but she don't see it now. Of course if she had had to lose the jewels *they* would have brought her to reason. As it is she don't in

the least realize the horrible thing that she's done;—not in the least, not in the least! And the *idea* of going to his villa *today!* So unusual, you know;—so positively improper! So utterly contrary to all custom! When I said to her, too, that she wouldn't be able even to afford Worth, she laughed and answered that she would have one dress from him every year for old friendship's sake for the Palestrina vintage balls, and that he would be sure to embroider her the loveliest Bacchic symbolisms and put the cone of the thyrsus for buttons!—only fancy! She could actually jest about *that!* How miserable she will be in three months when she has come back to her senses; and how miserable she will make *him!*"

"Chère comtesse," said the Duc, taking up his hat and cane, "everybody repents everything. It is a law of Fate. The only difference is that some people repent pleasantly, and some unpleasantly. Let us hope that our beautiful Duchesse will repent pleasantly. Madame, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer. Bon voyage; au revoir."

THE END

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